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Le et al.

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(54) **UNIVERSAL AUTOMATED CIRCUIT BOARD TESTER**

(75) Inventors: **Chanh Le**, Beaverton, OR (US); **Say Cheong Gan**, Melaka (MY); **Thomas A. Repko**, Dallas, OR (US); **Frank W. Joyce**, Portland, OR (US); **Teik Sean Toh**, Sungai Petani (MY); **Douglas P. Kreager**, Lake Oswego, OR (US); **Yoong Li Liew**, Kulim (MY)

(73) Assignee: **Intel Corporation**, Santa Clara, CA (US)

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See application file for complete search history.

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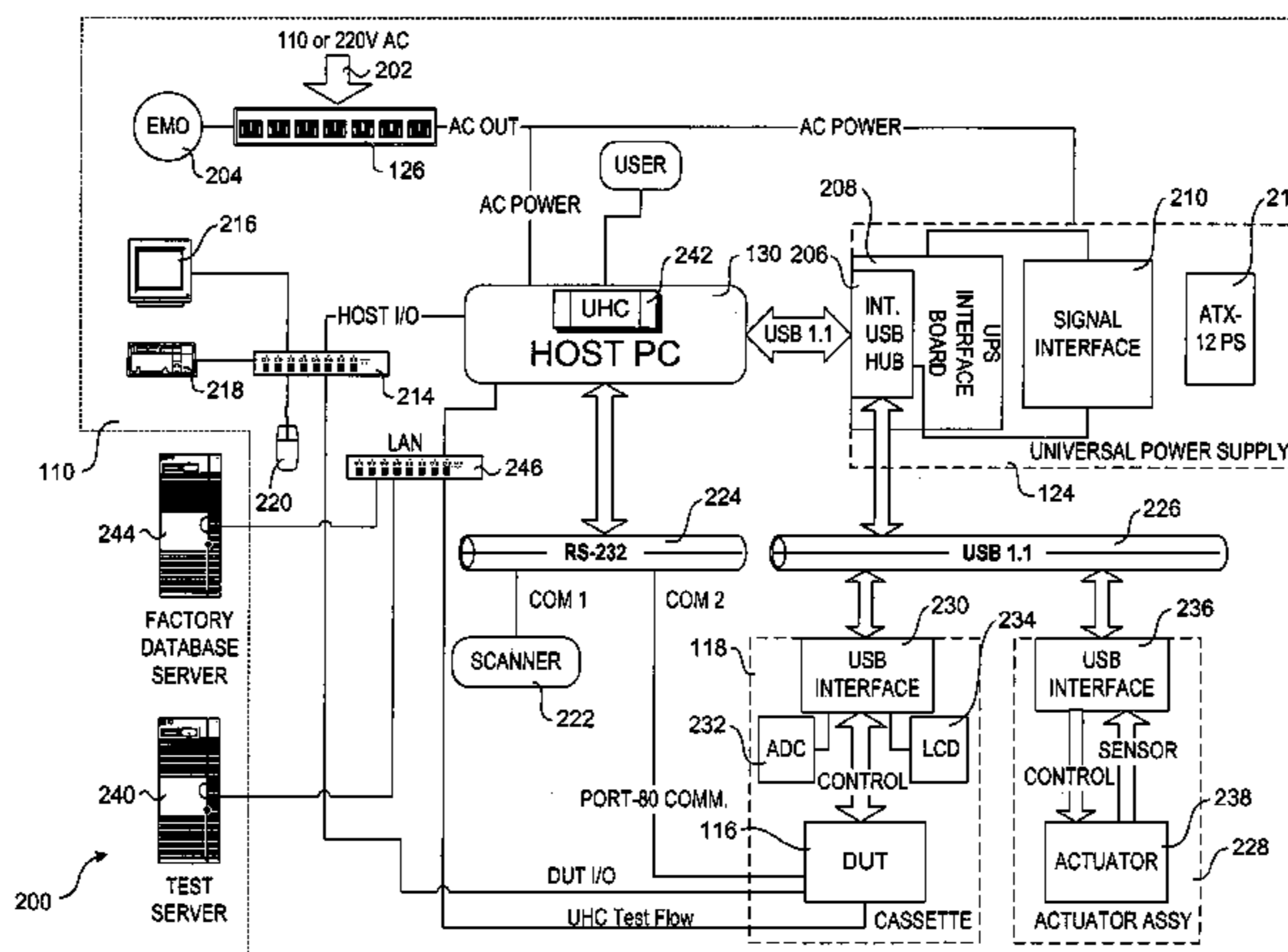
Primary Examiner—Felix Suarez

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Blakely, Sokoloff, Taylor & Zafman LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

An apparatus and method for automatically testing circuit boards, such as computer system boards and the like. The circuit board device under test (DUT) is loaded into an automated test apparatus (tester), which includes a mechanism for automatically connecting test electronics to various DUT circuitry and I/O ports via corresponding connectors on the DUT. A type of DUT is identified, and a corresponding set of tests are performed to verify the operation of the DUT. Appropriate power signals and sequencing are also applied to the DUT, as defined by its type. Data logging is performed to log the results of the testing. The apparatus includes replaceable probe/connector plates that are DUT-type specific and corresponding universal electronics and cabling to enable a variety of different board types to be tested with the same apparatus.

21 Claims, 24 Drawing Sheets



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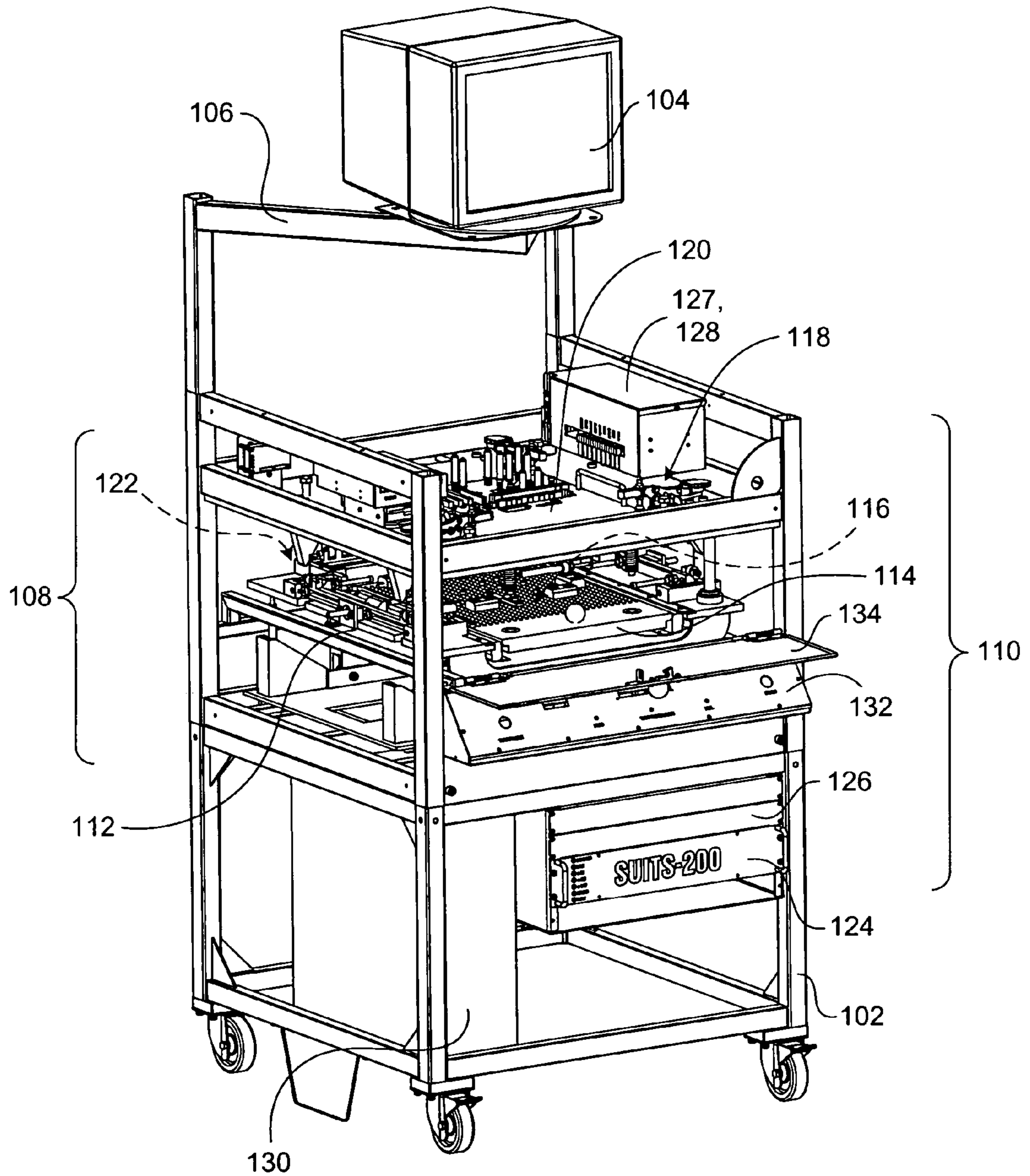
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100

Fig. 1A

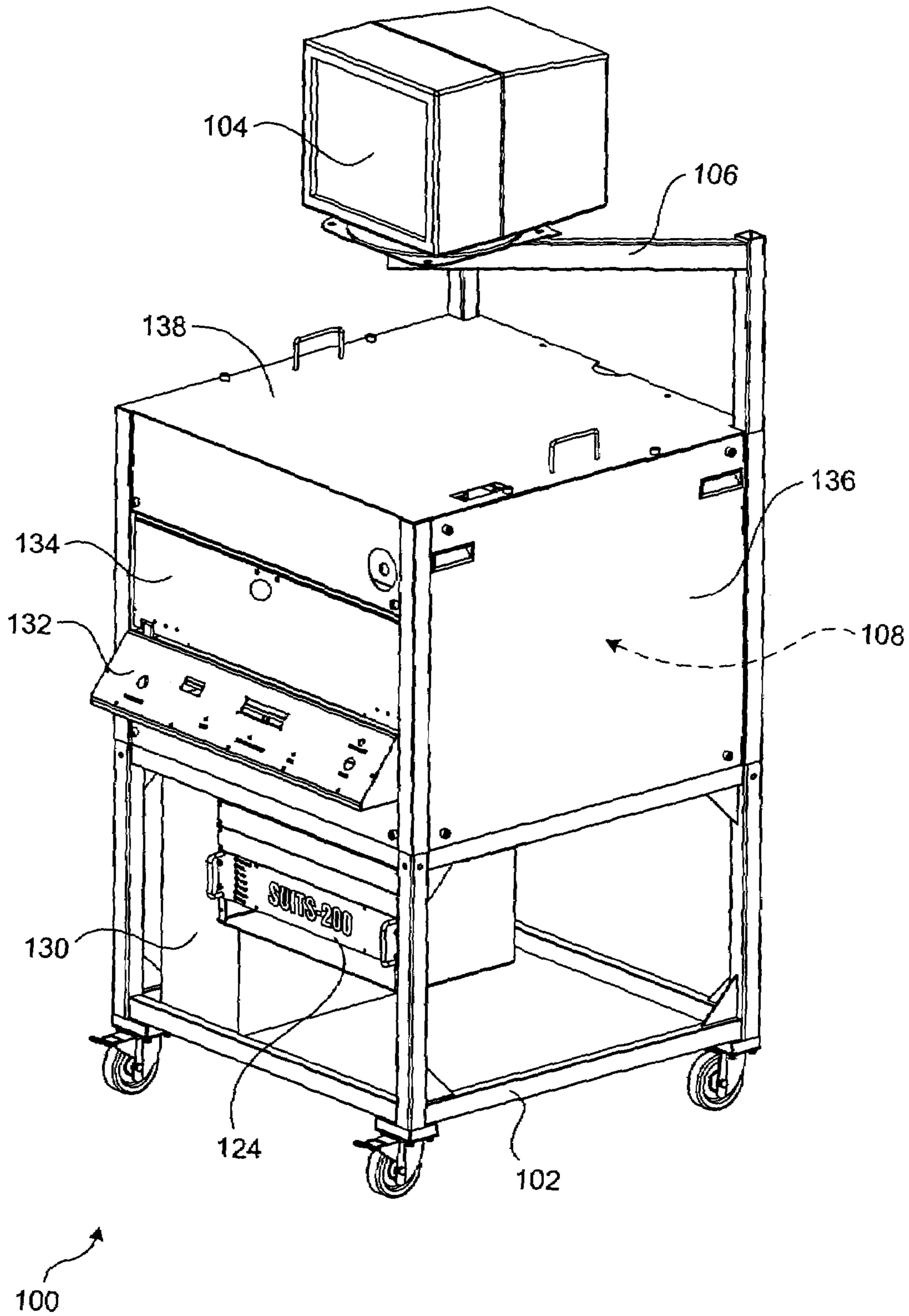
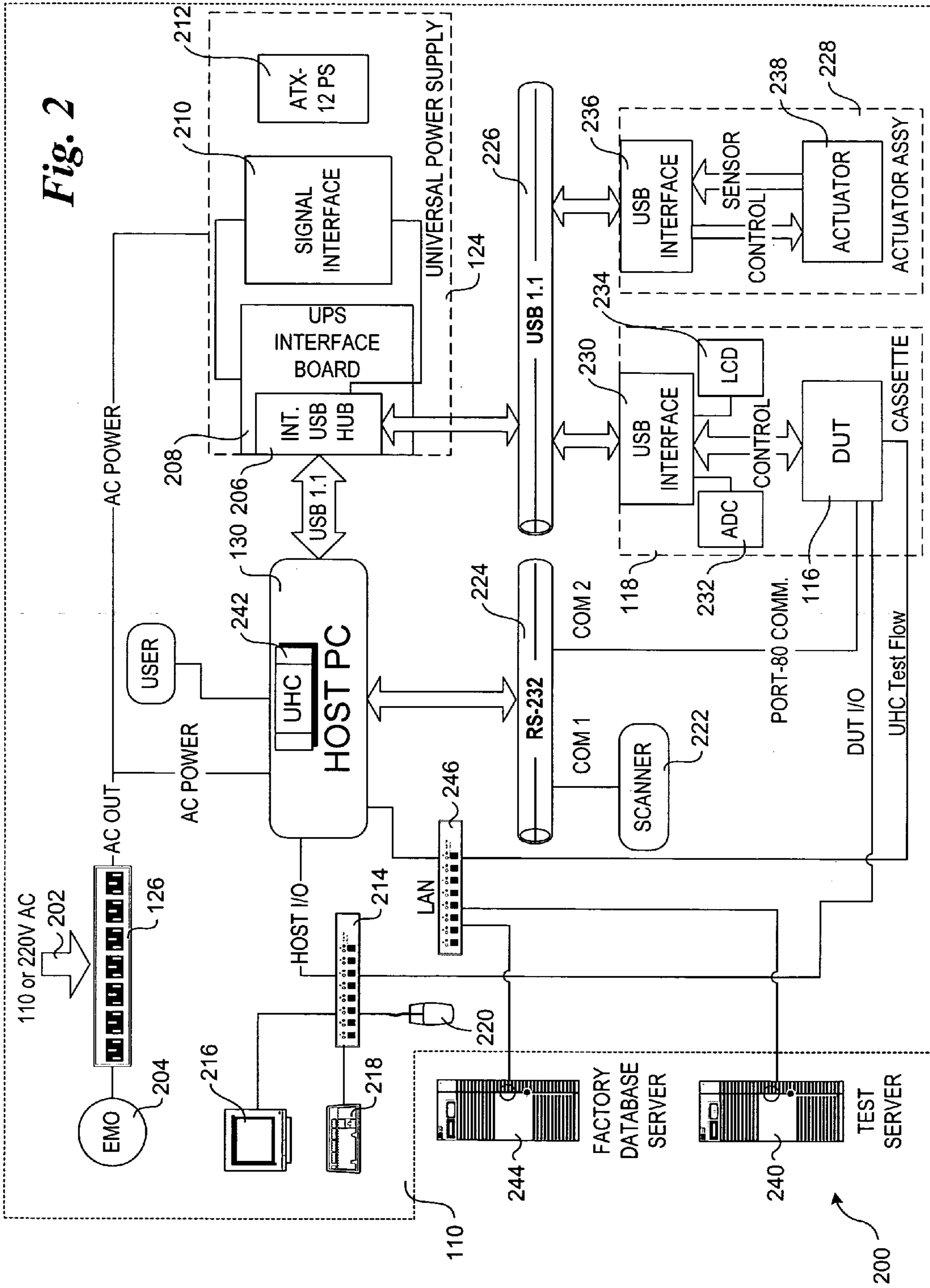


Fig. 1B



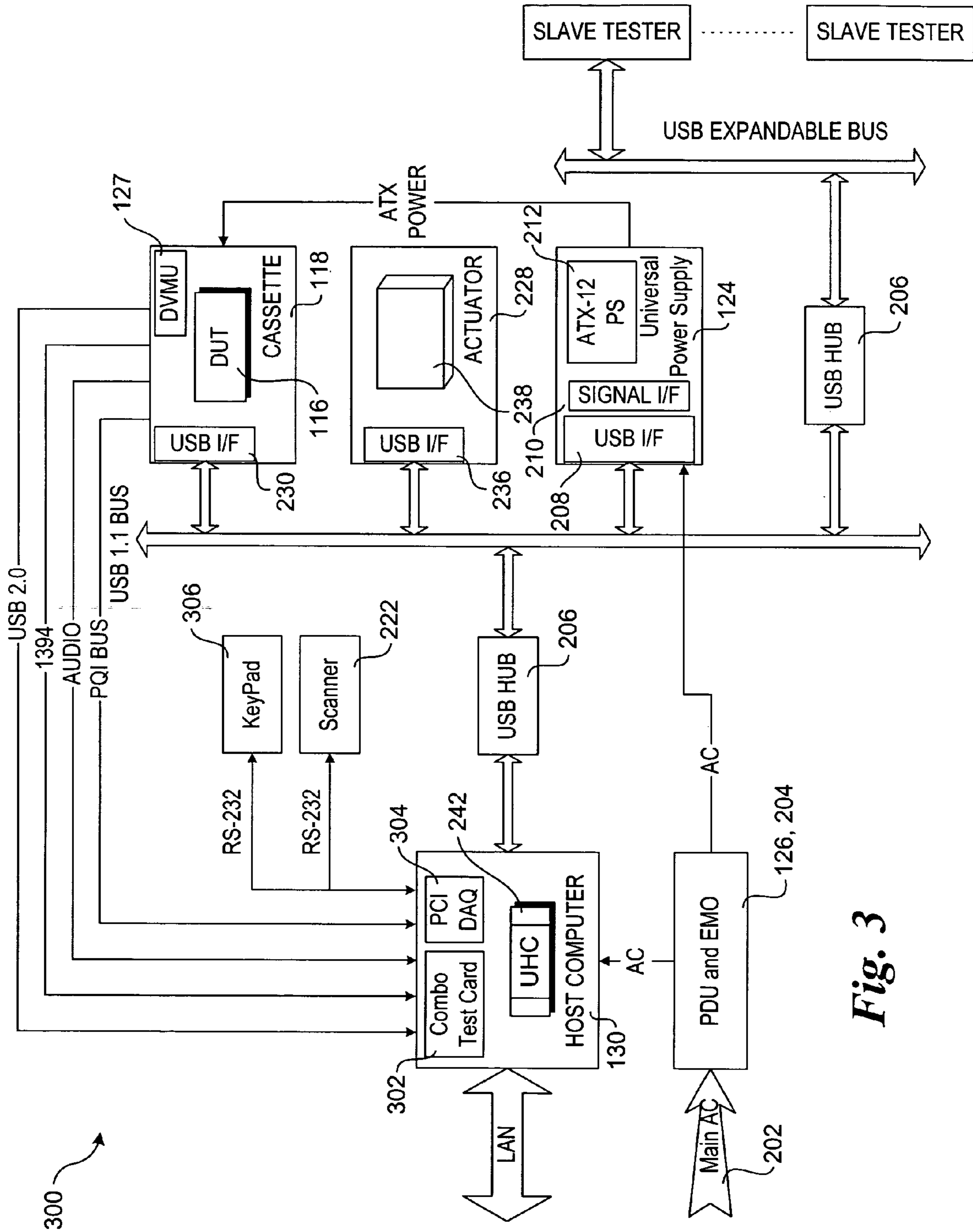


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

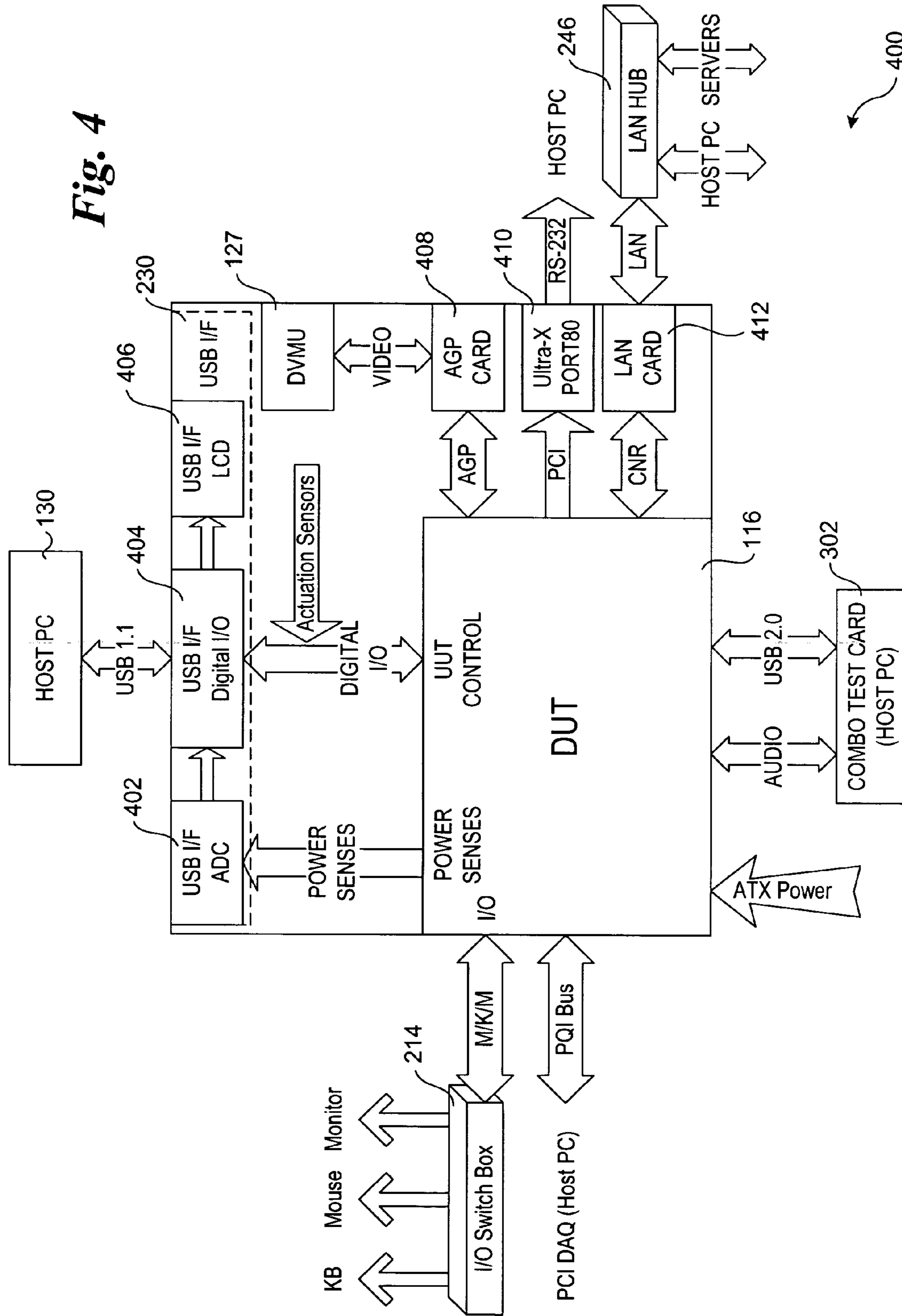
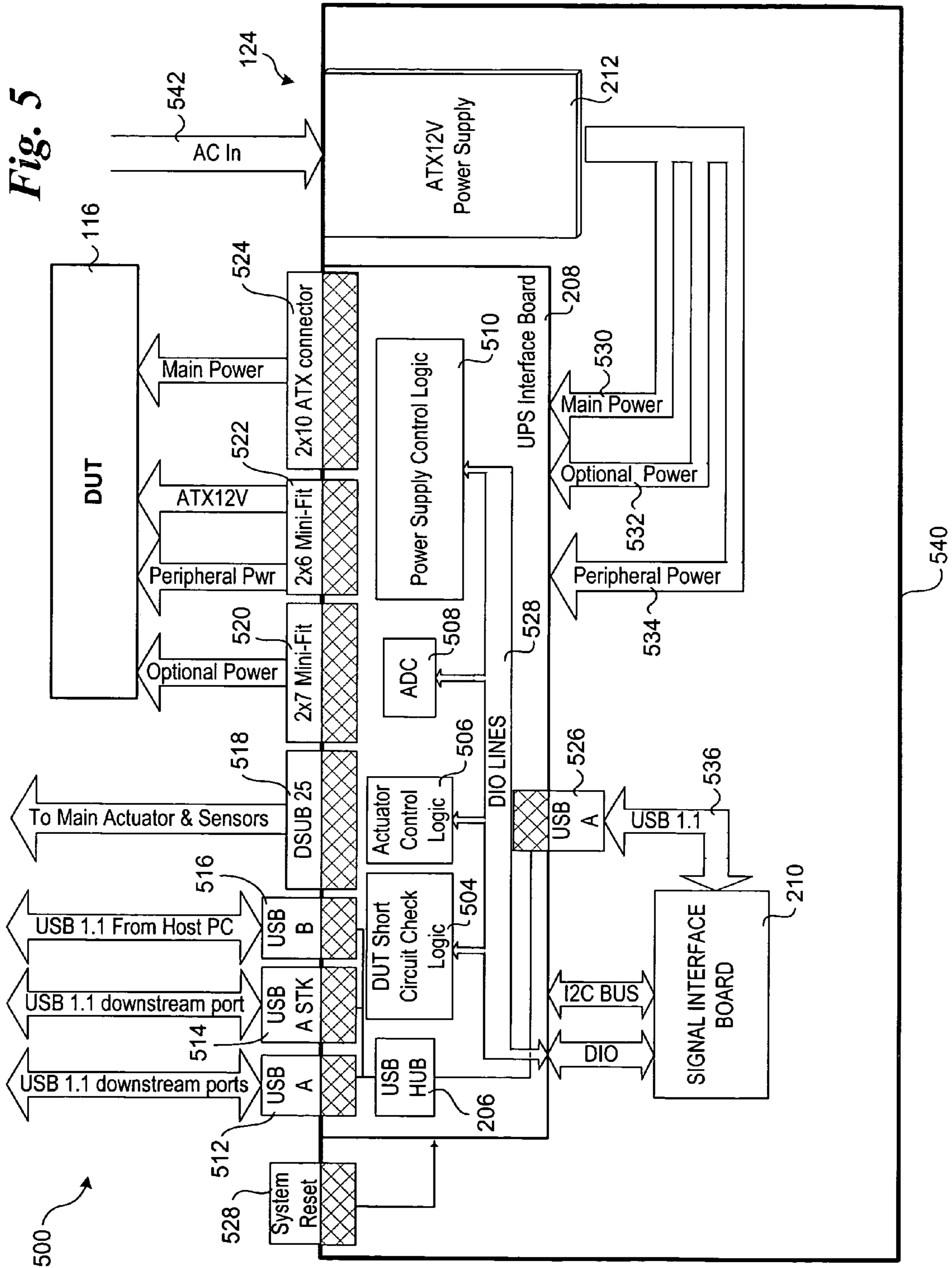
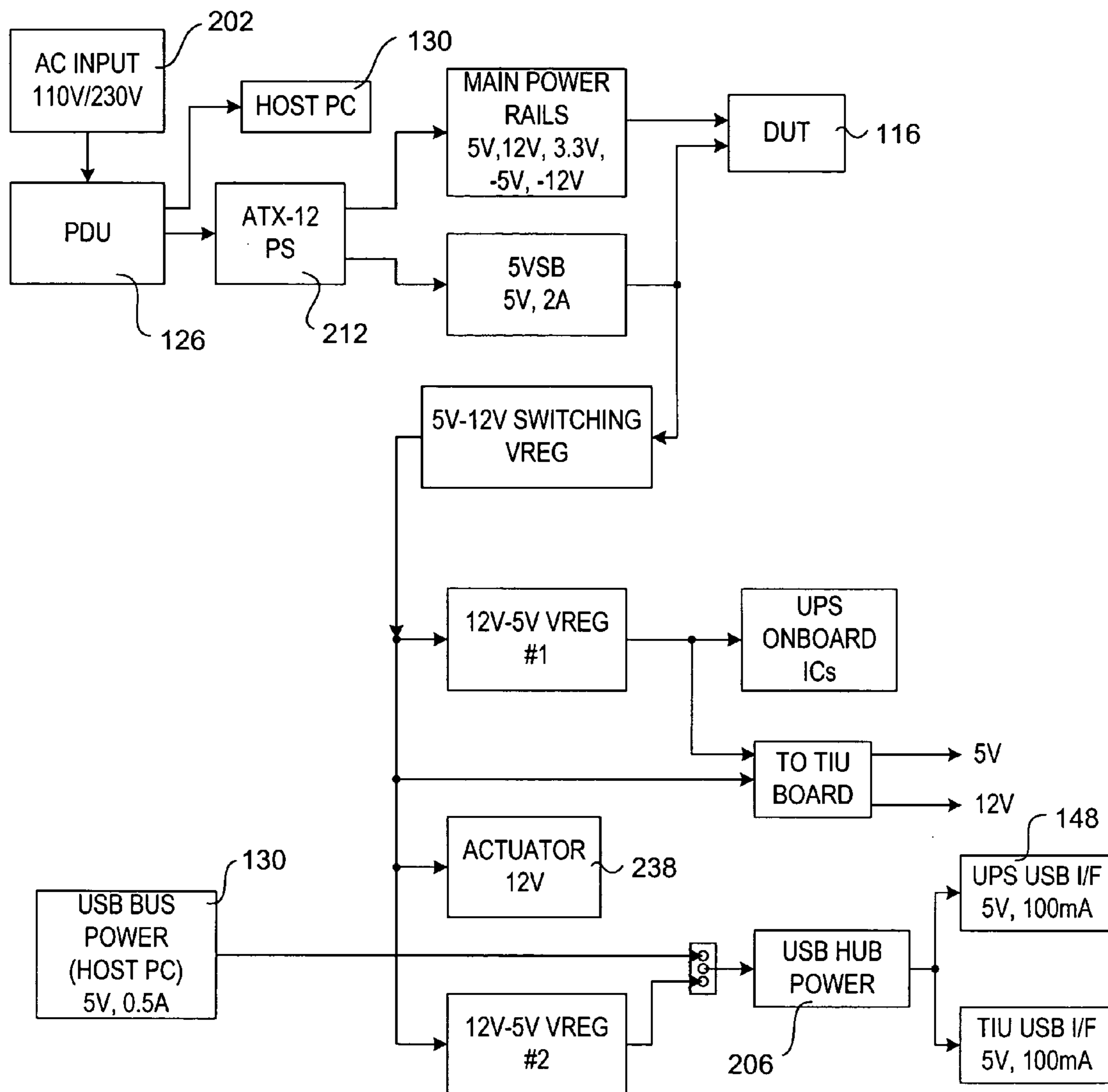


Fig. 5





600

FIG. 6

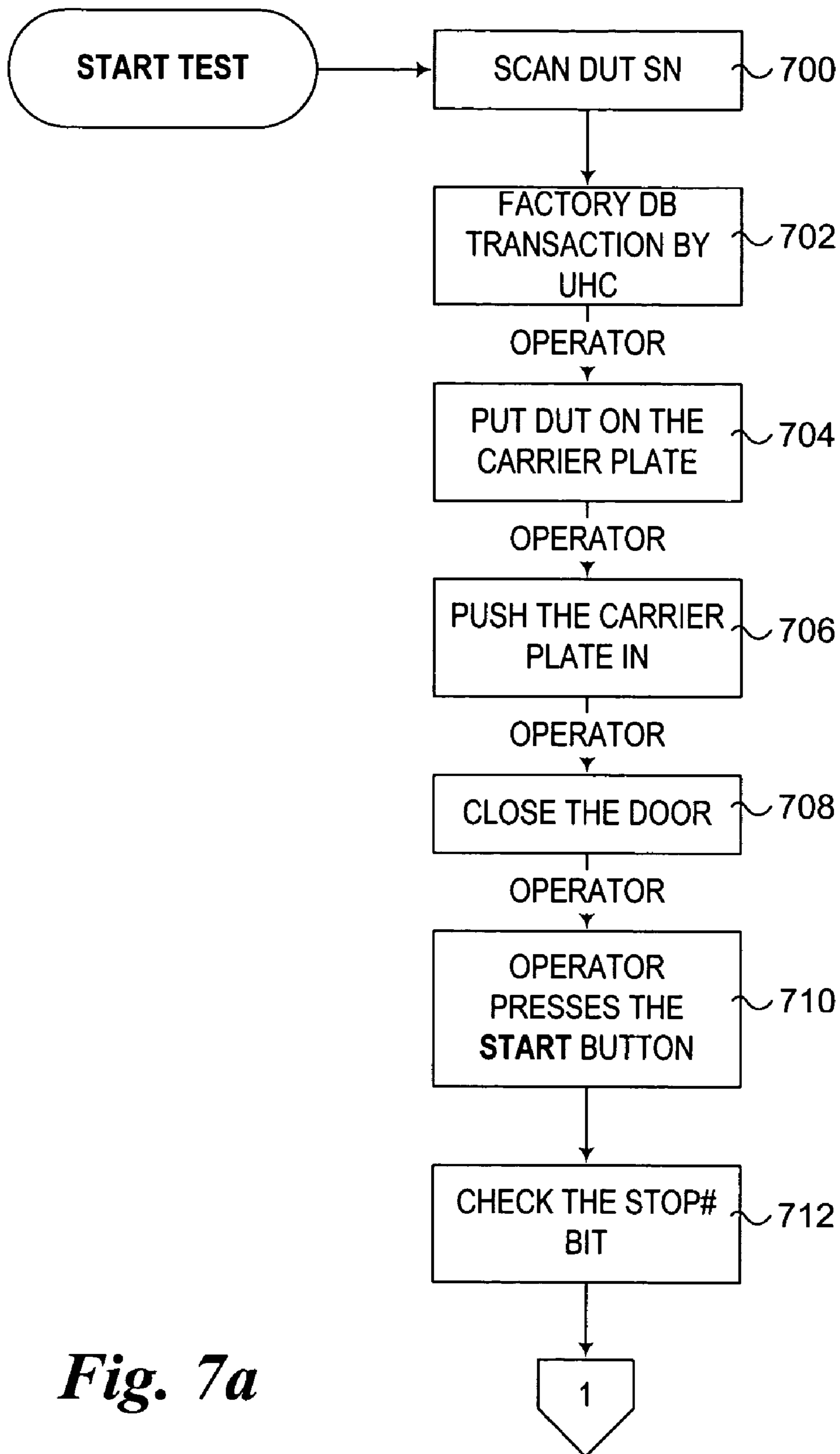


Fig. 7a

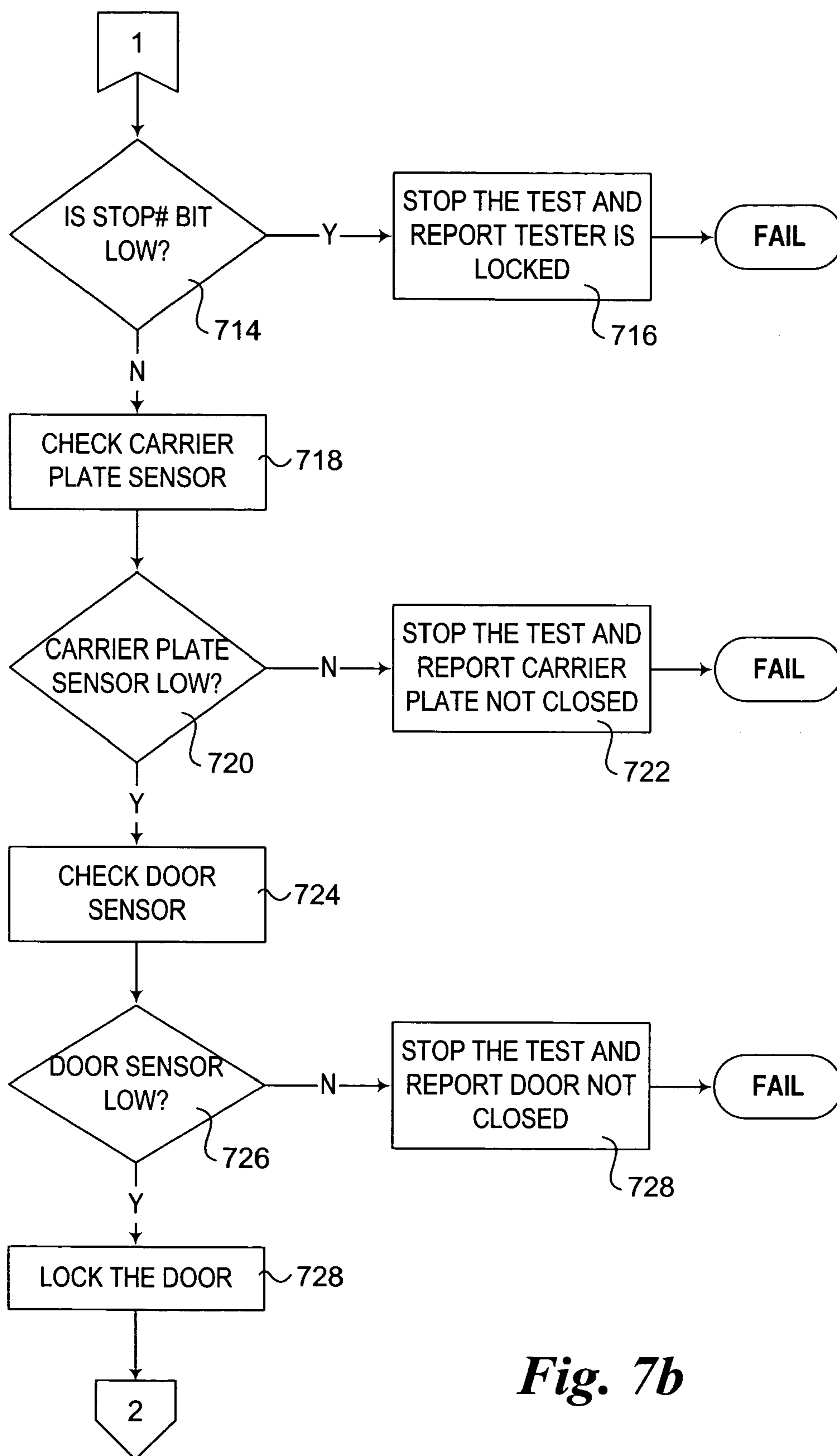


Fig. 7b

Fig. 7c

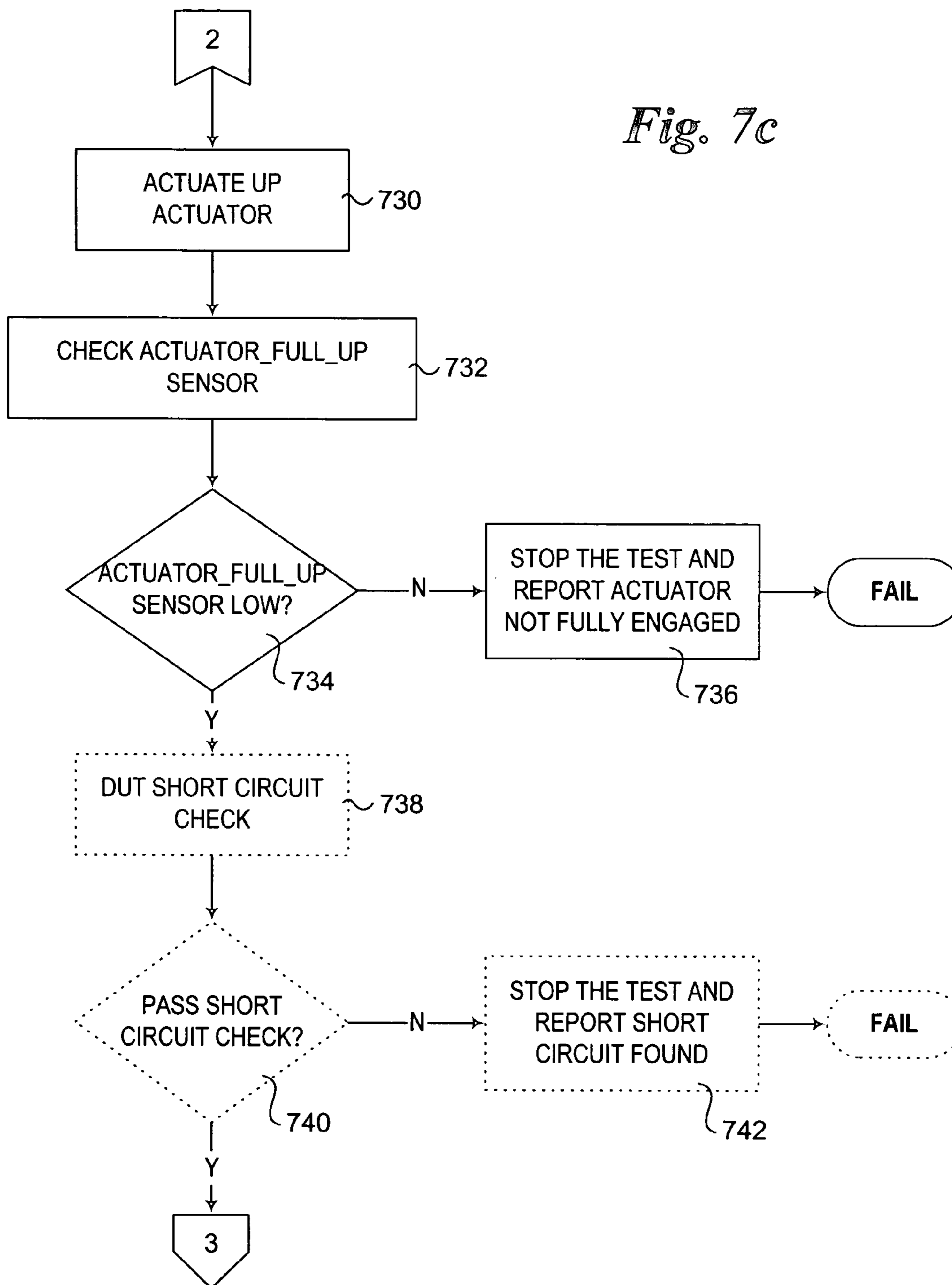


Fig. 7d

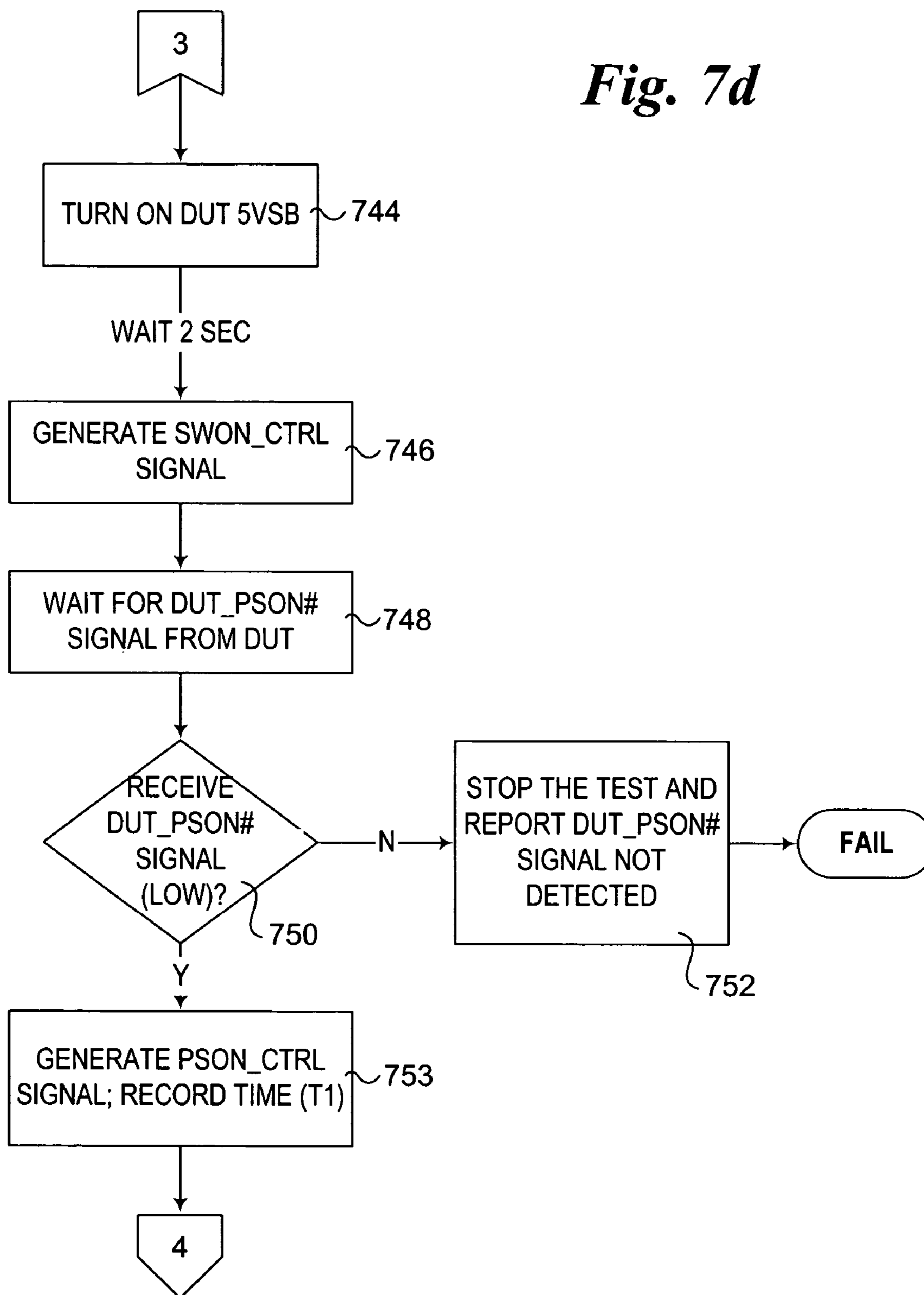
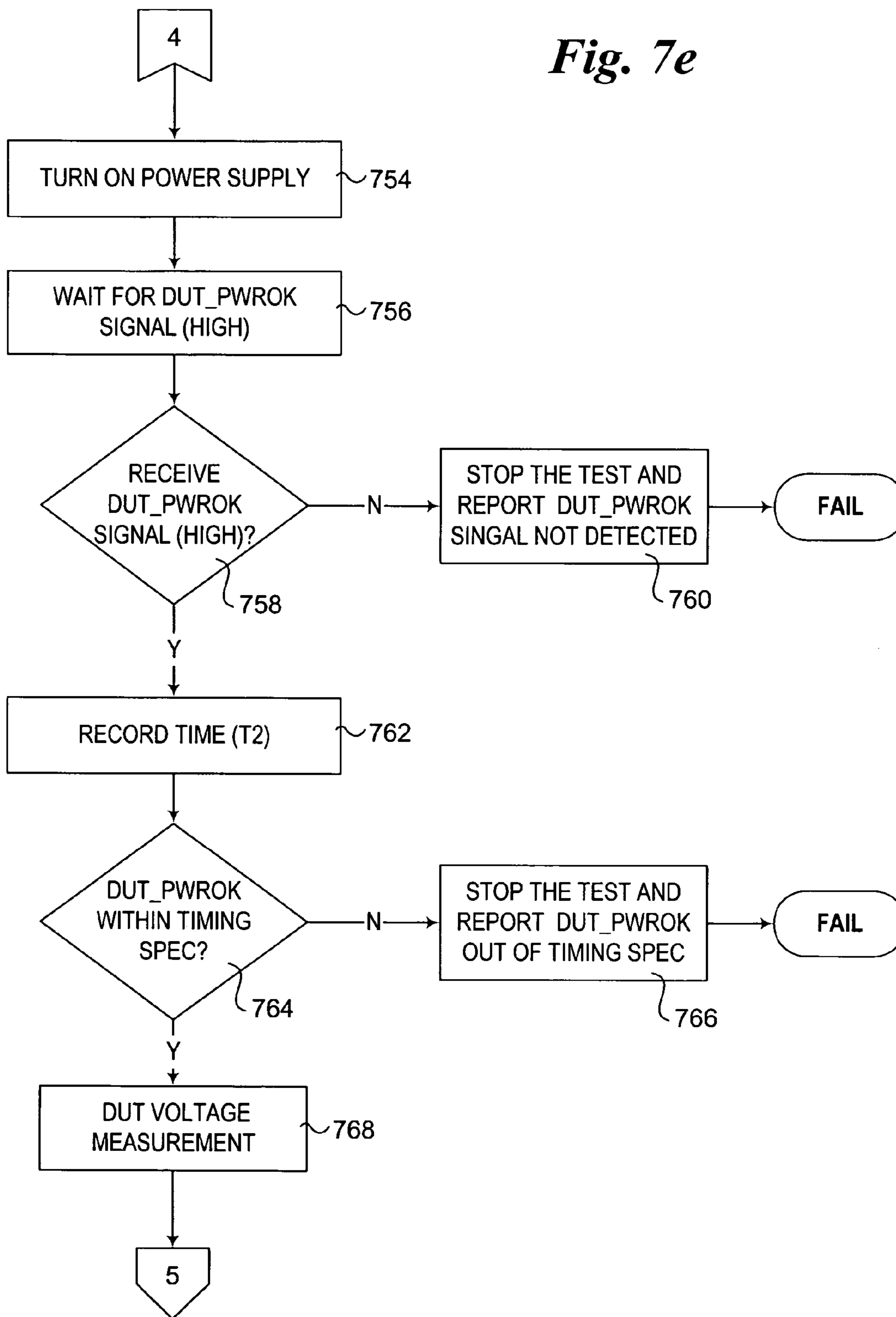


Fig. 7e



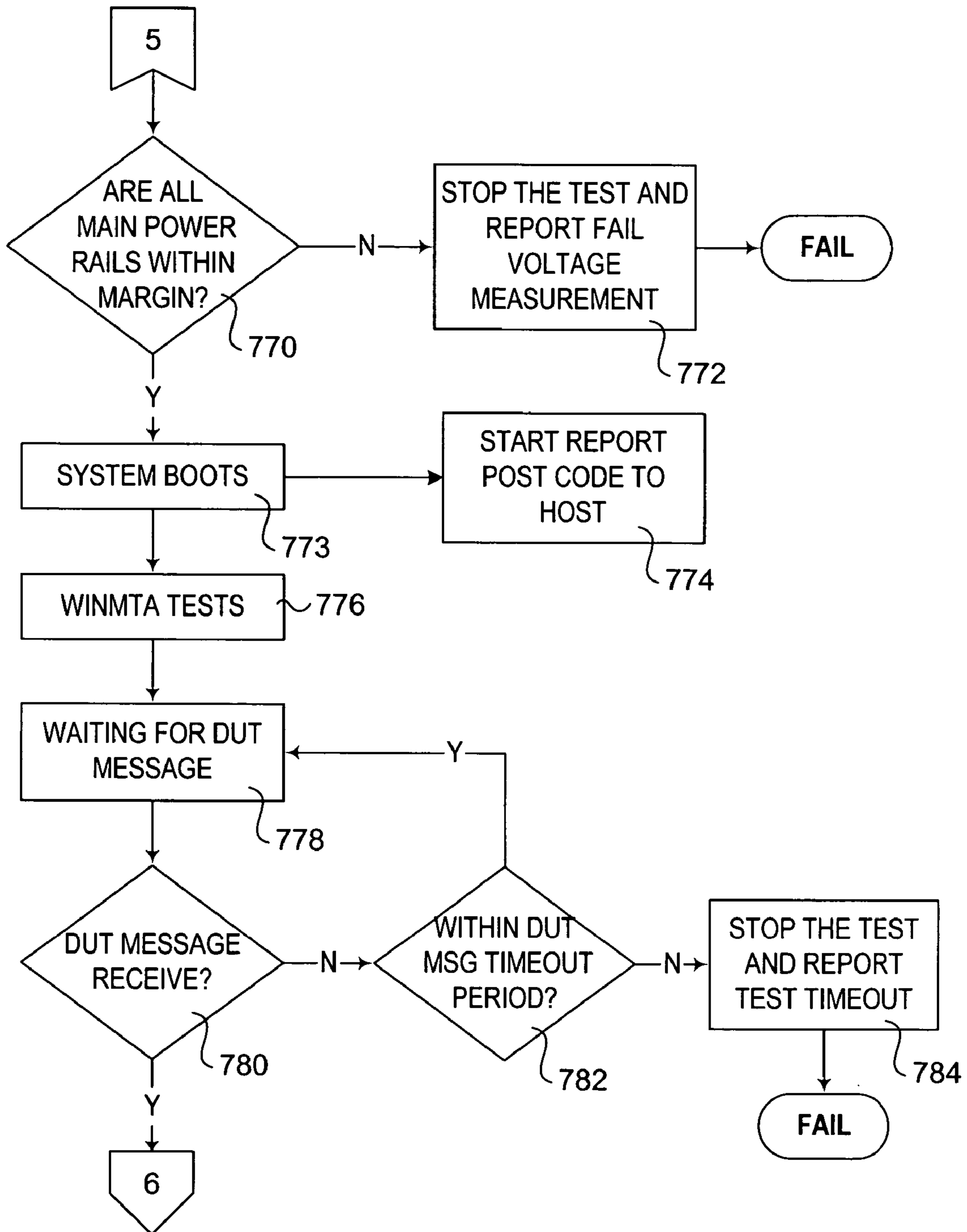


Fig. 7f

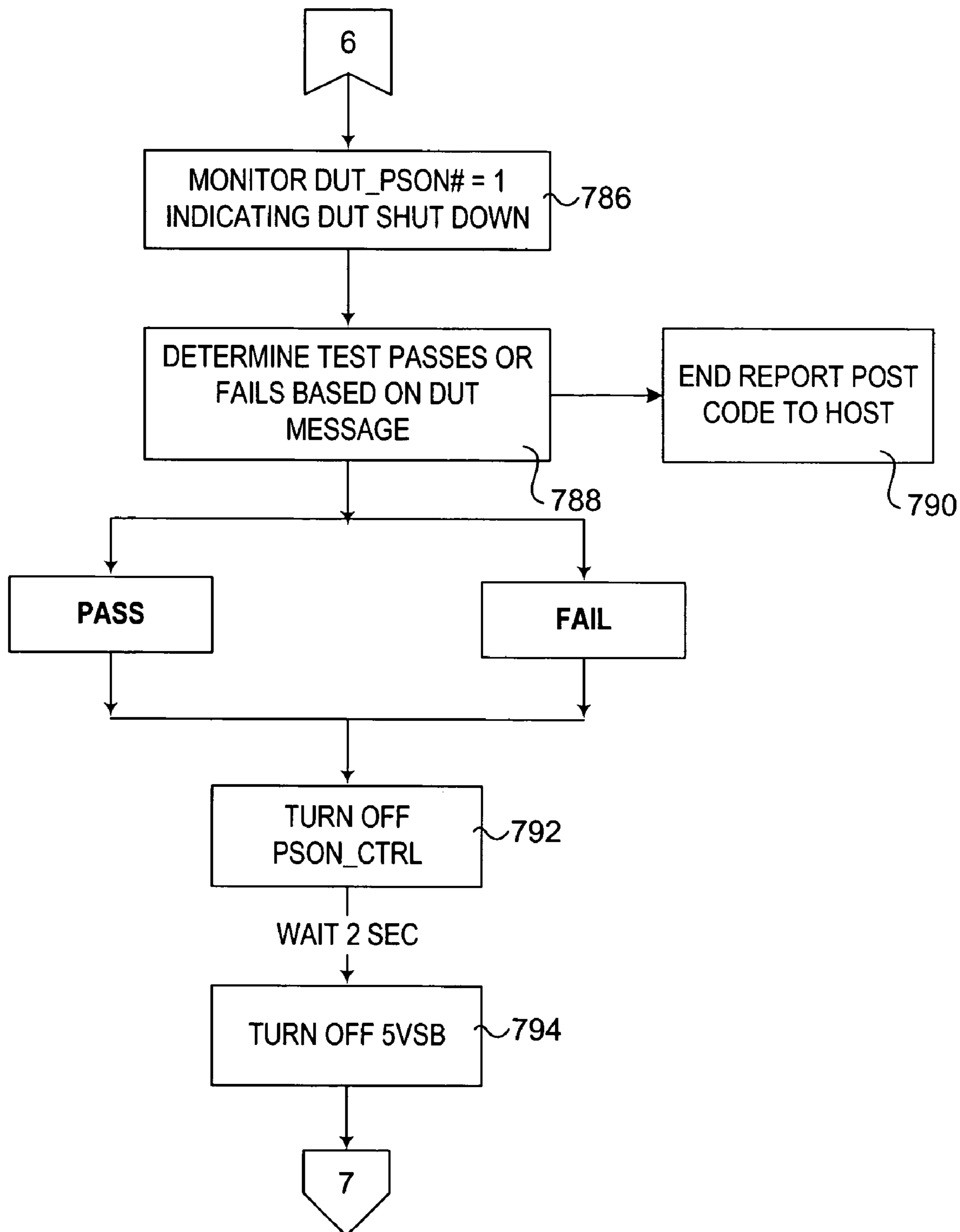
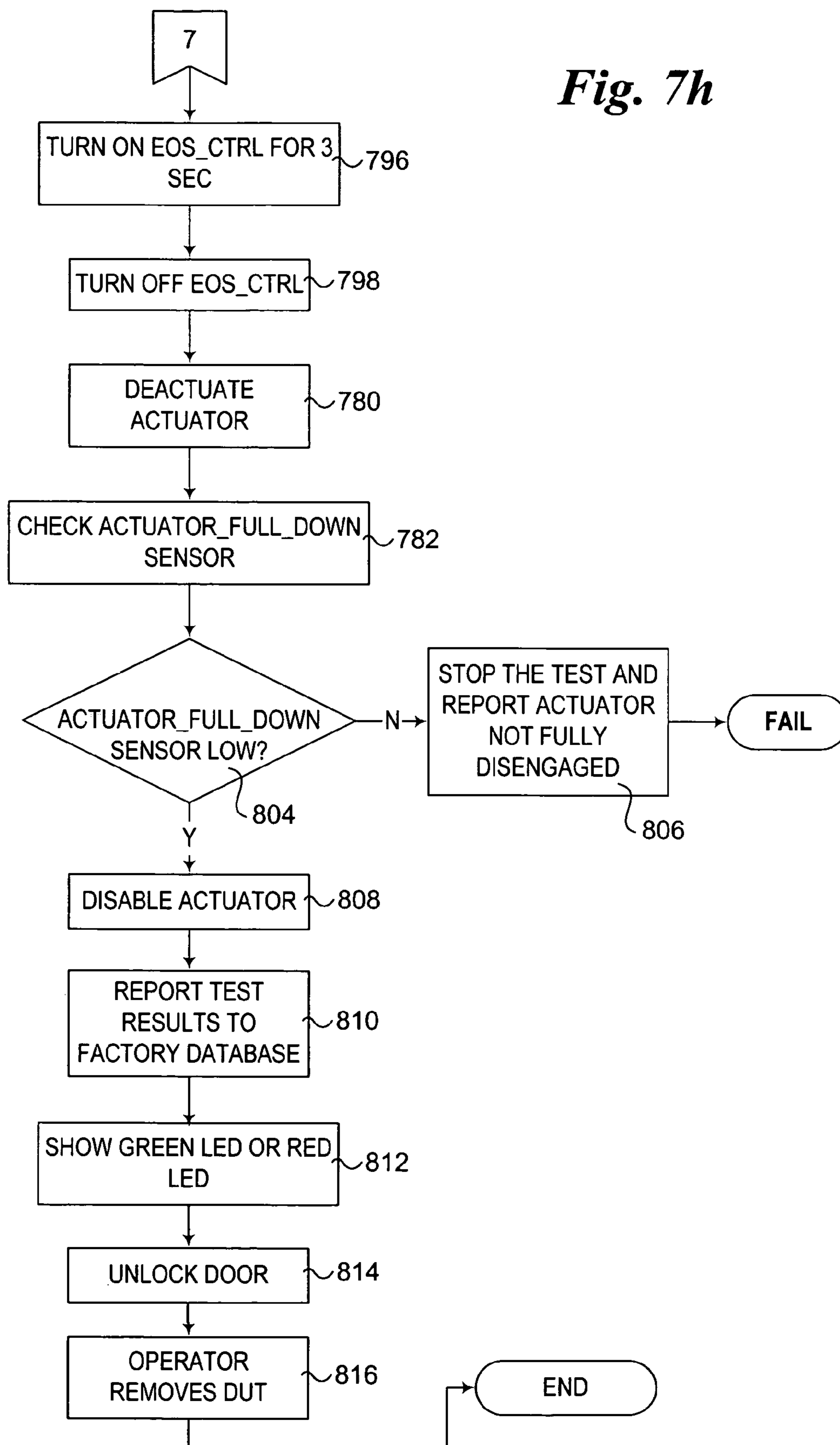


Fig. 7g

Fig. 7h



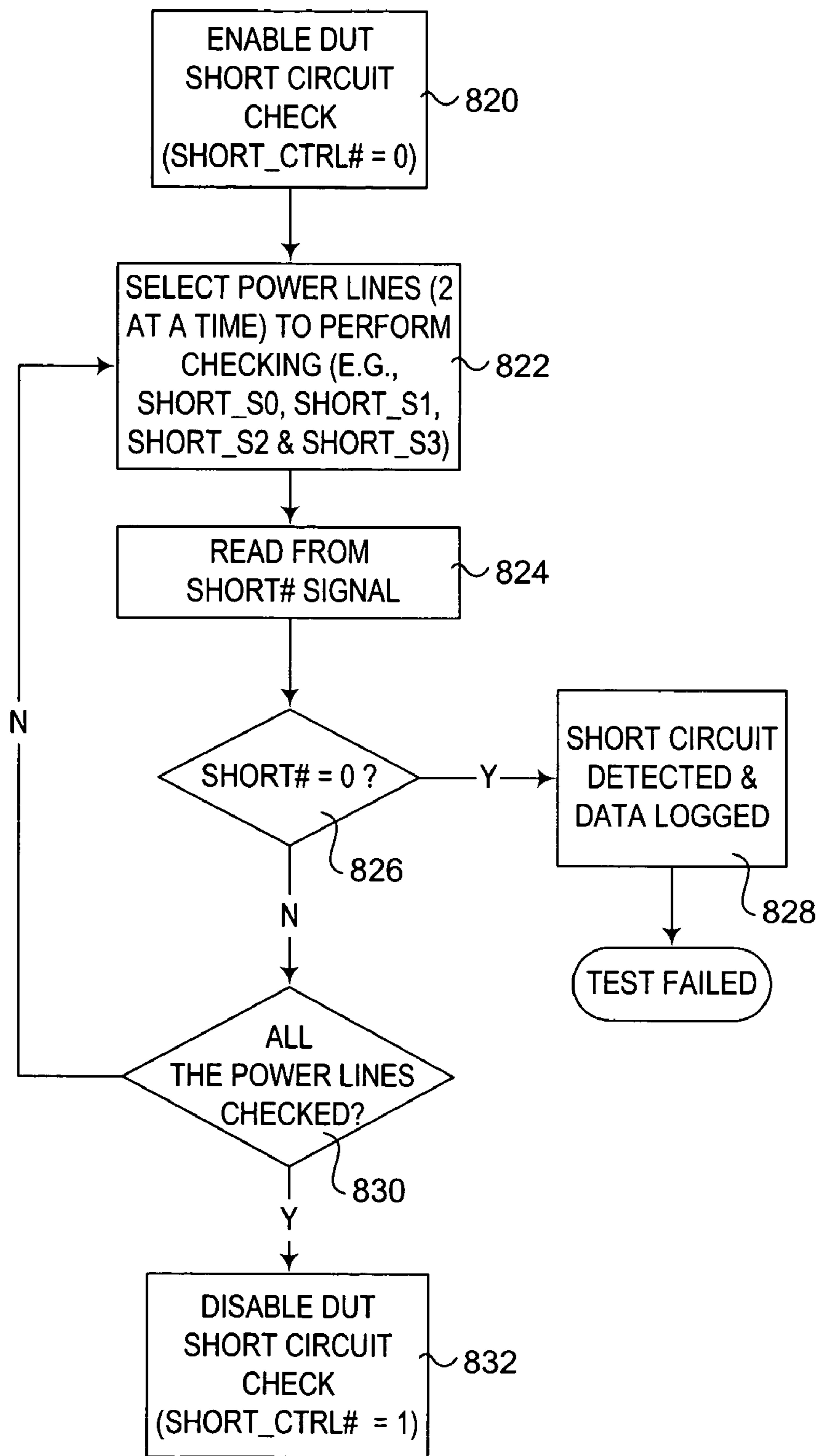


Fig. 8

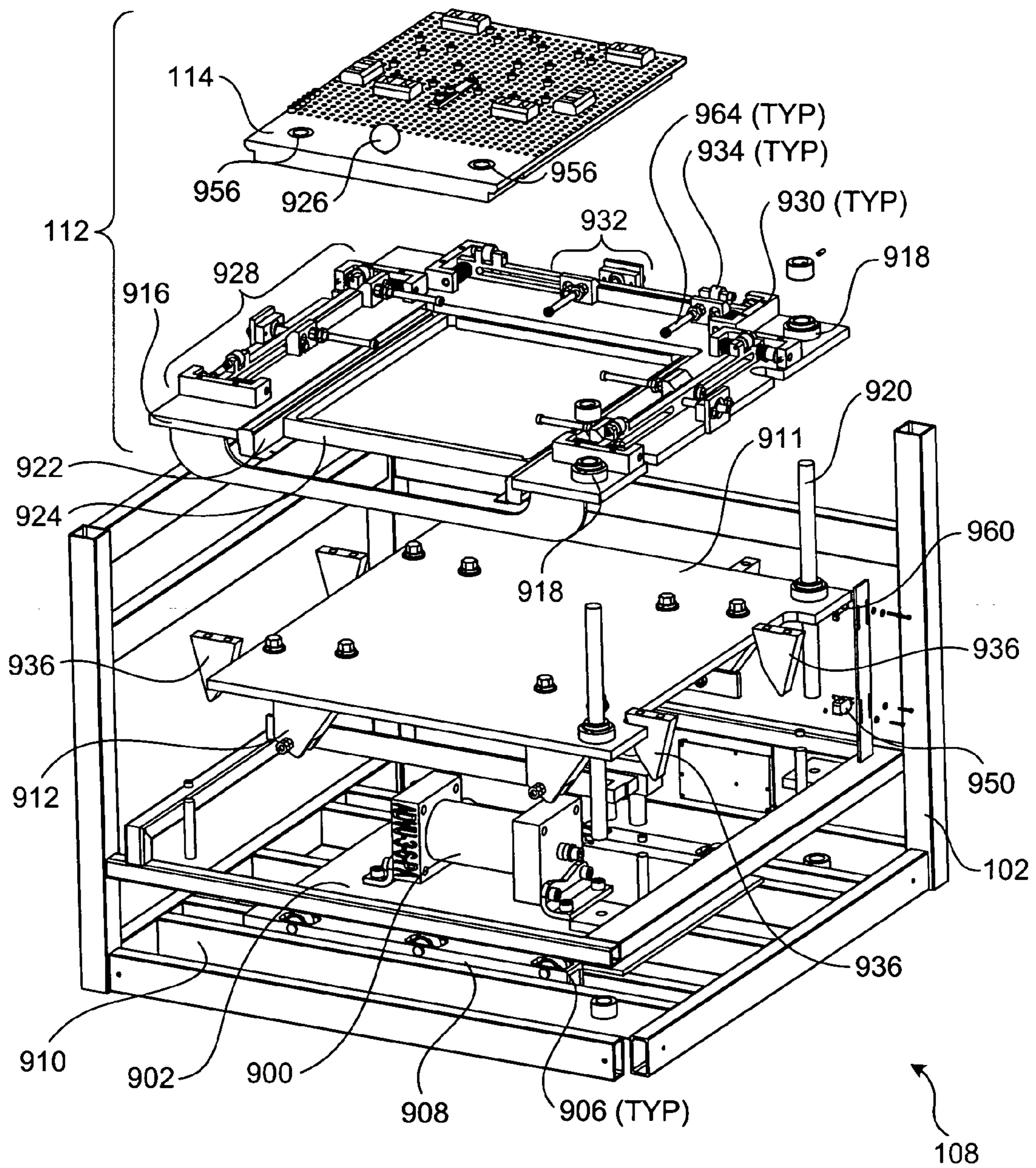


Fig. 9A

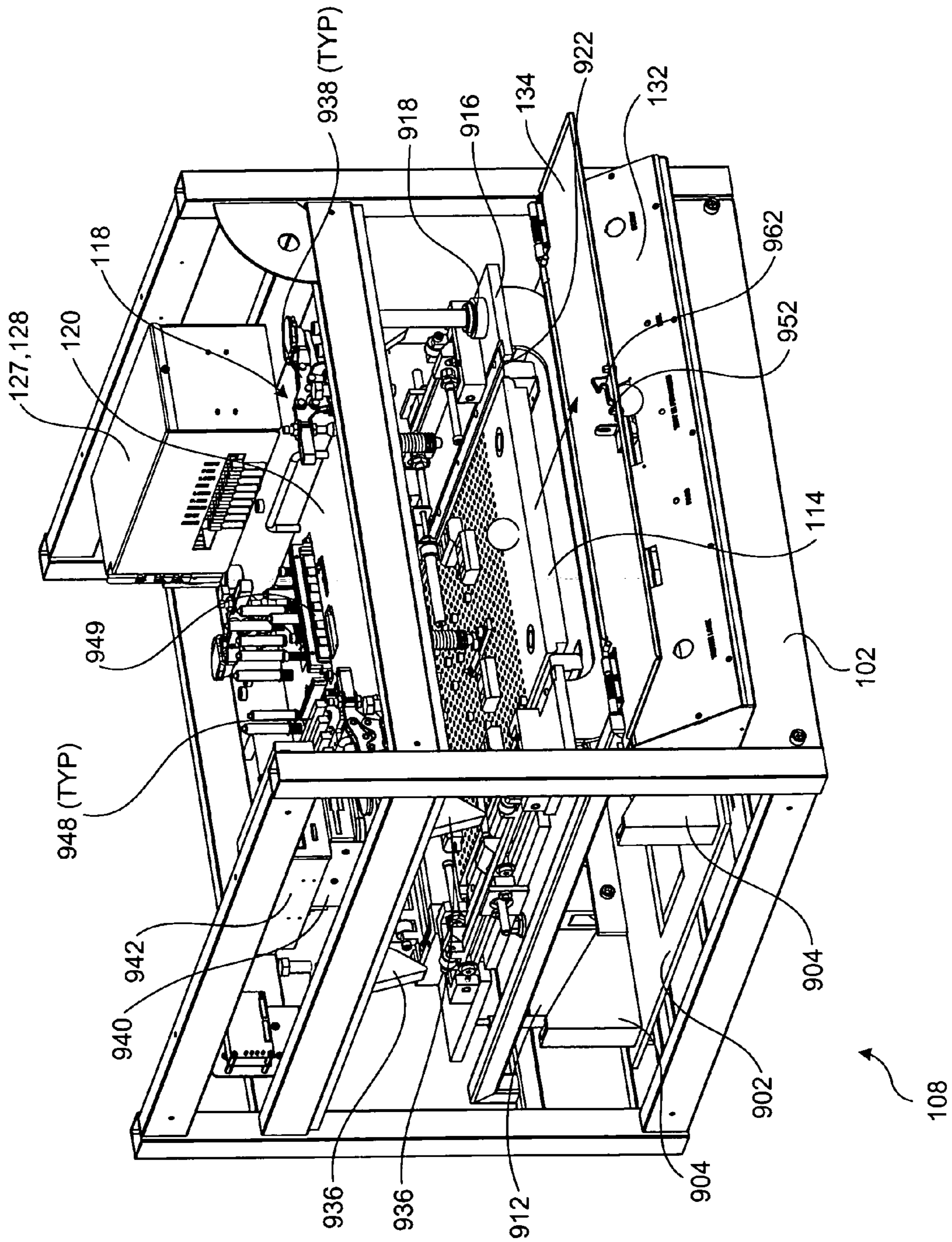


Fig. 9B

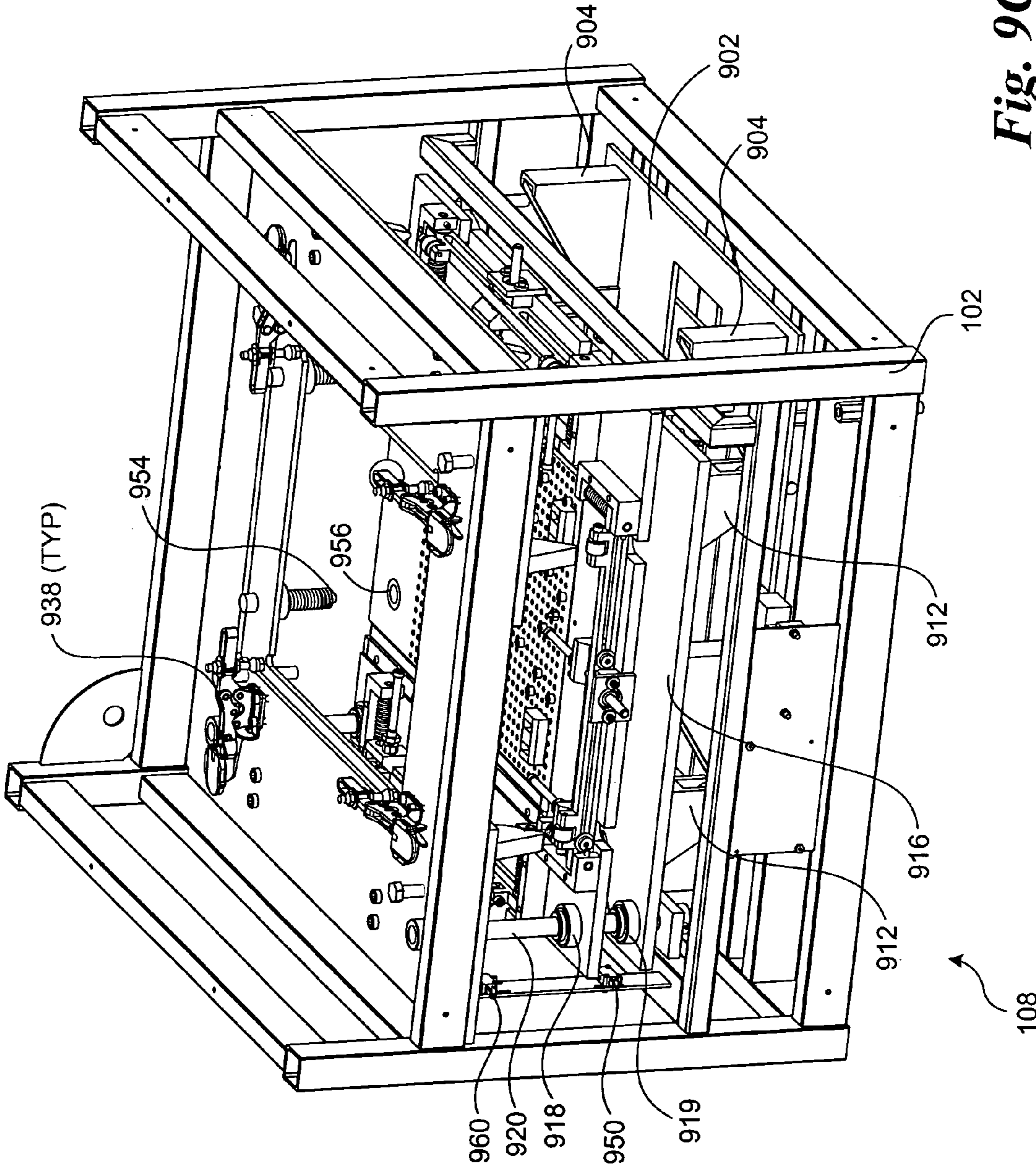


Fig. 9C

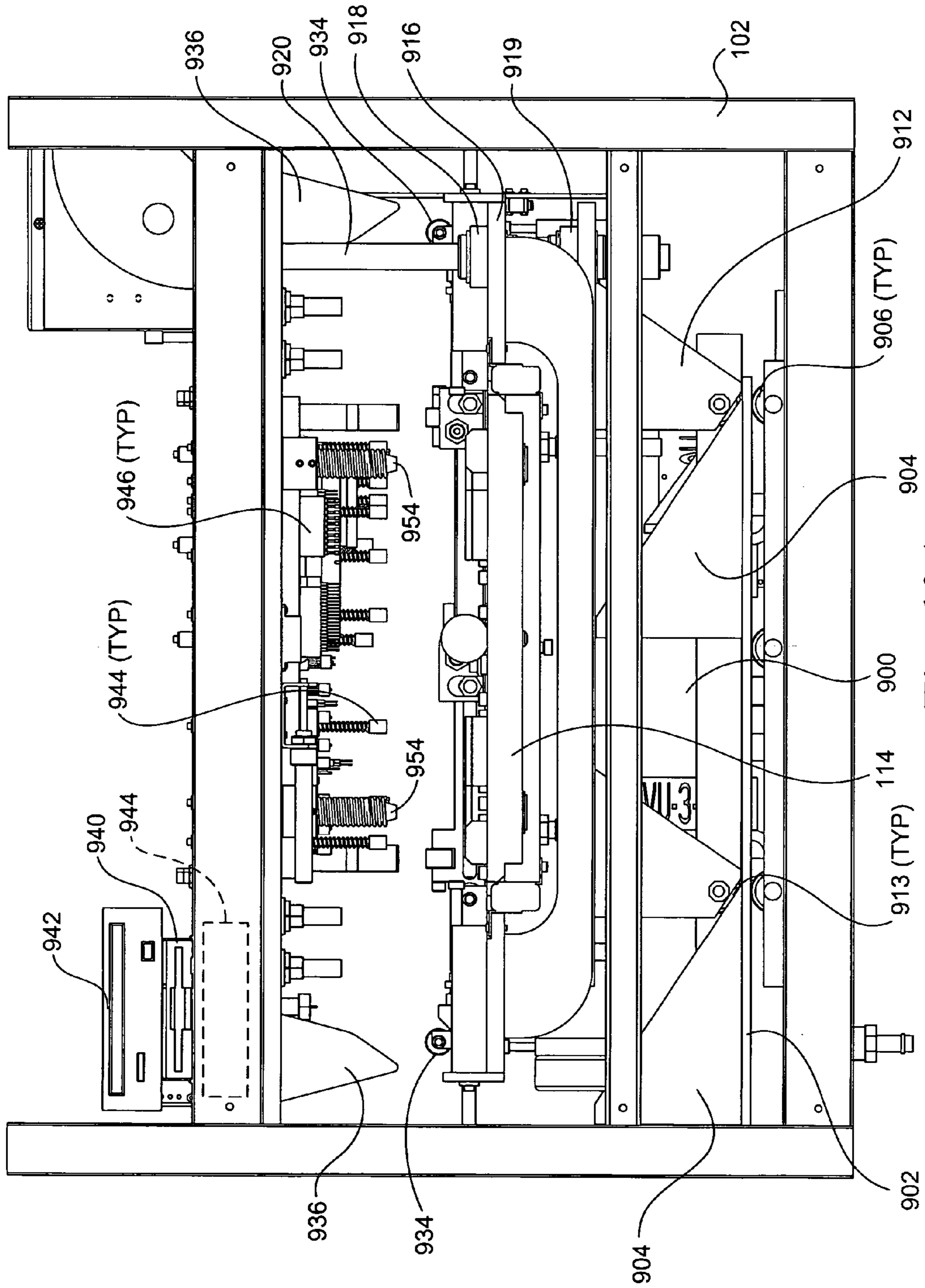


Fig. 10A

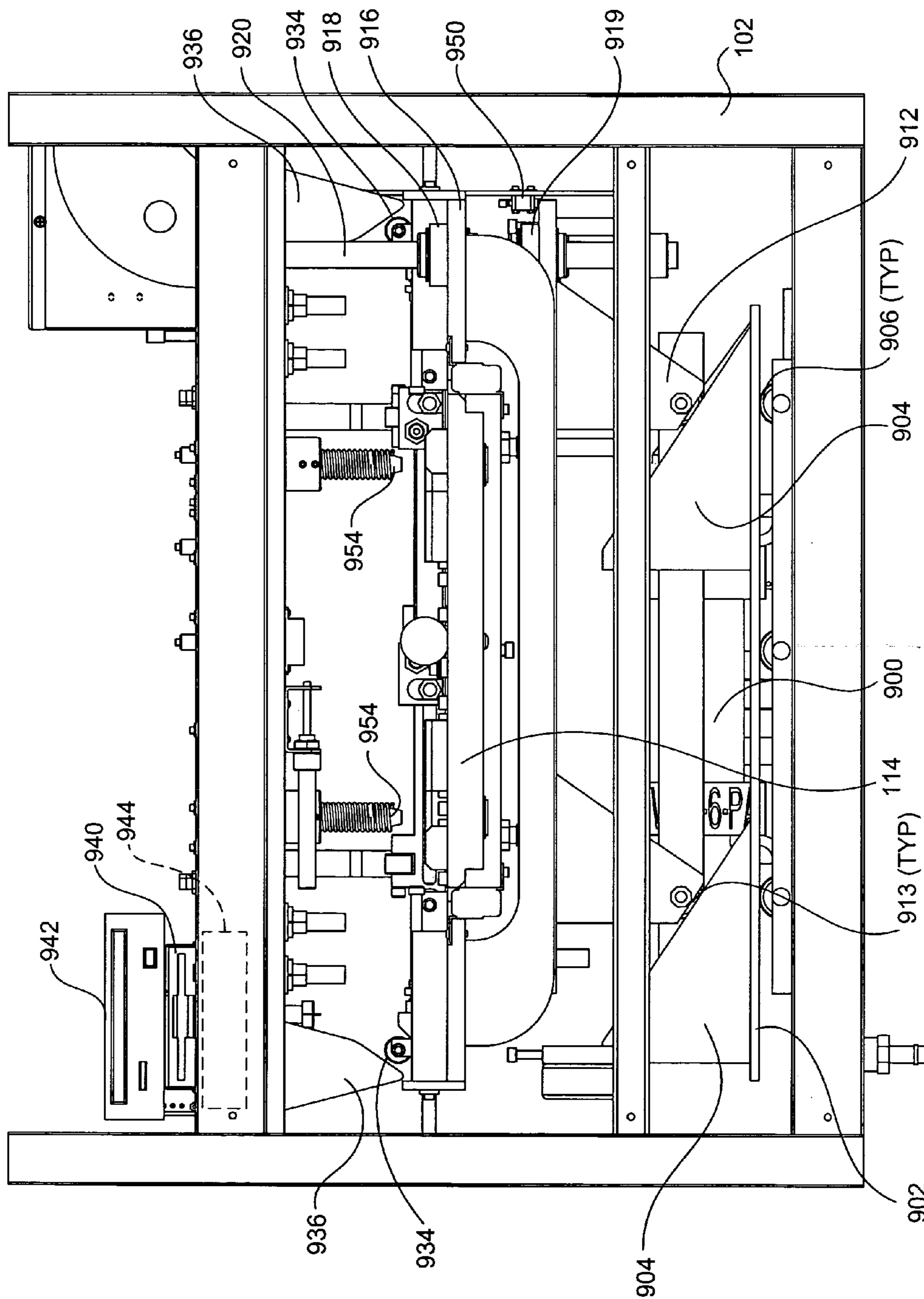


Fig. 10B

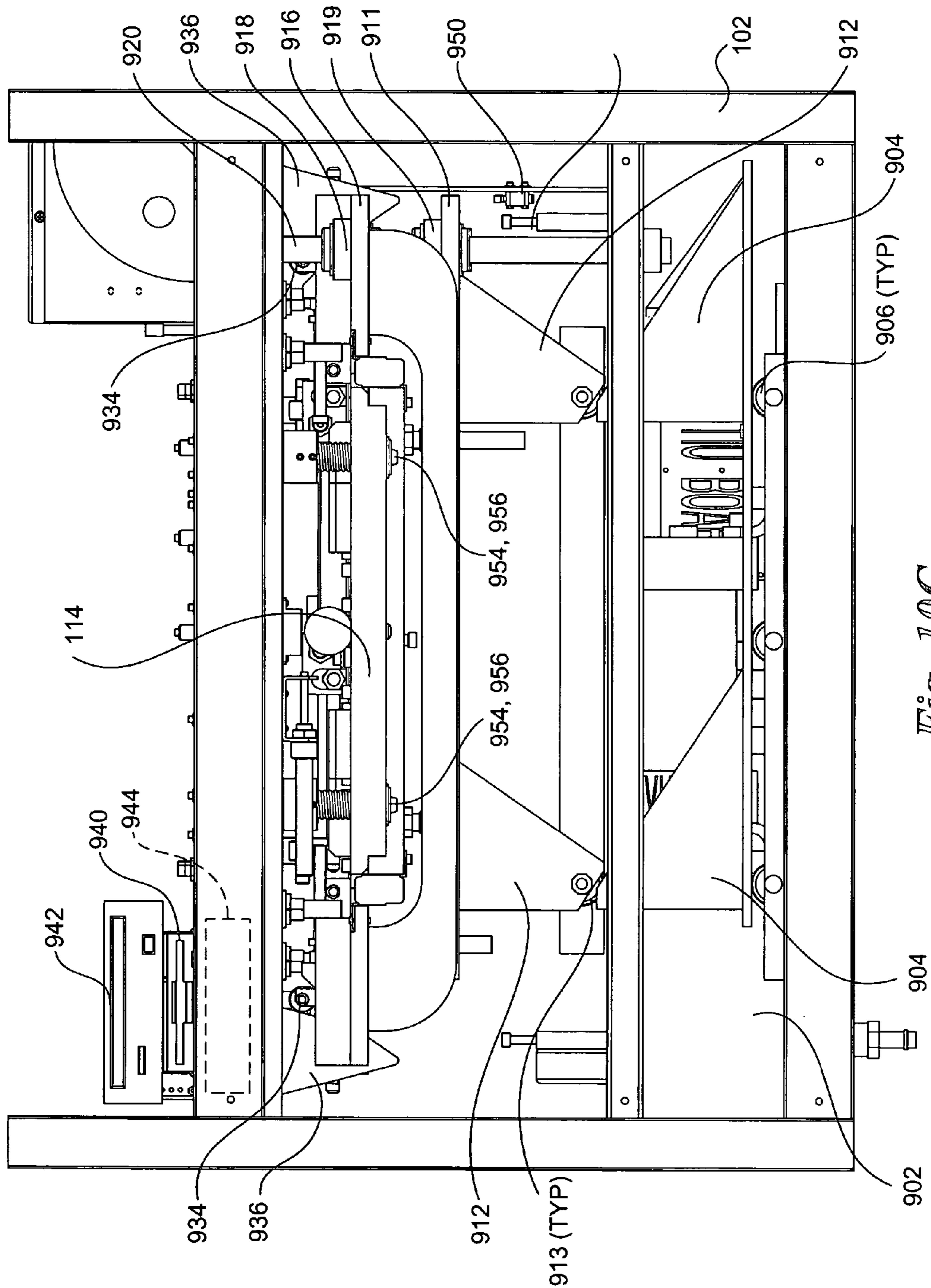


Fig. 10C

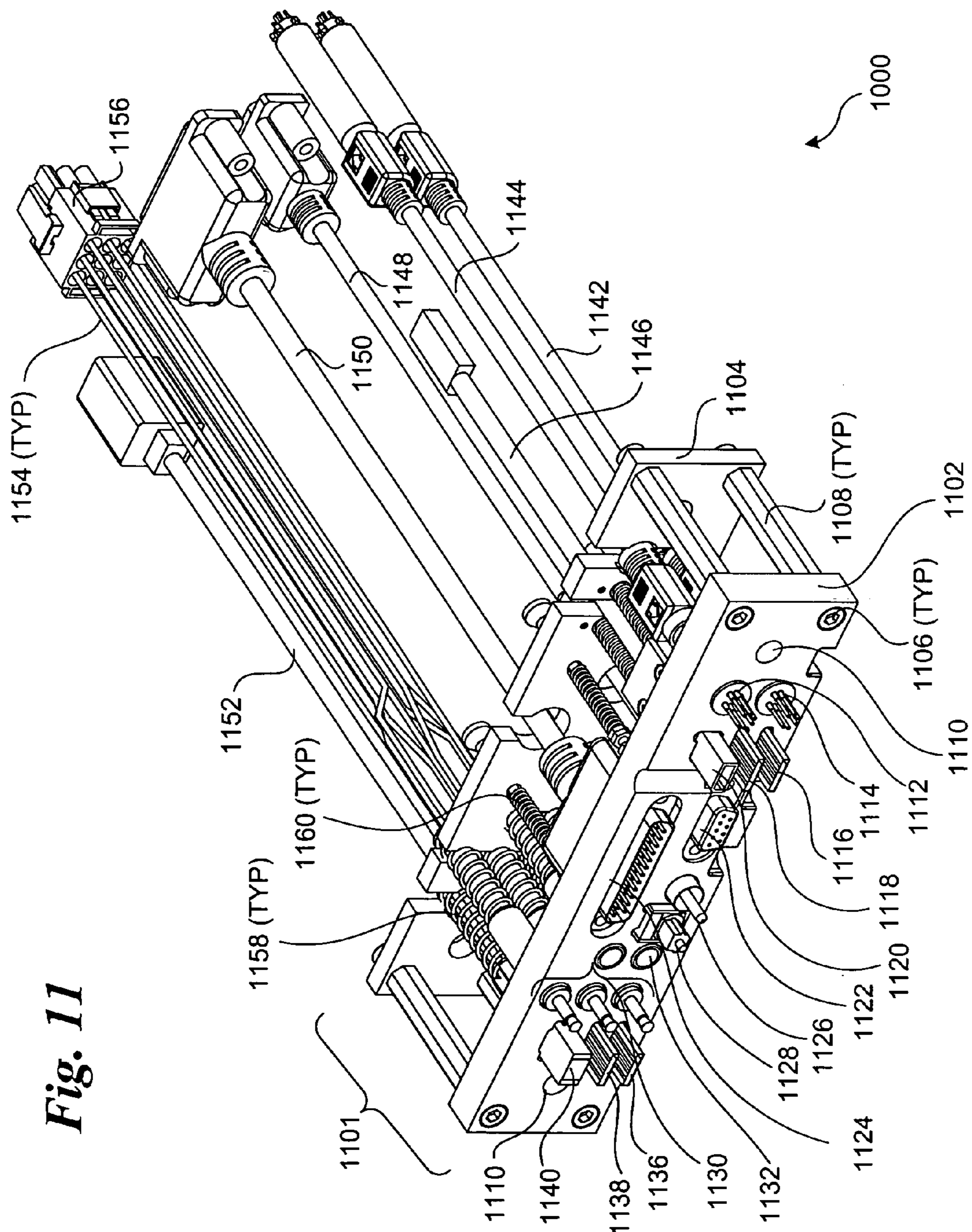


Fig. 11

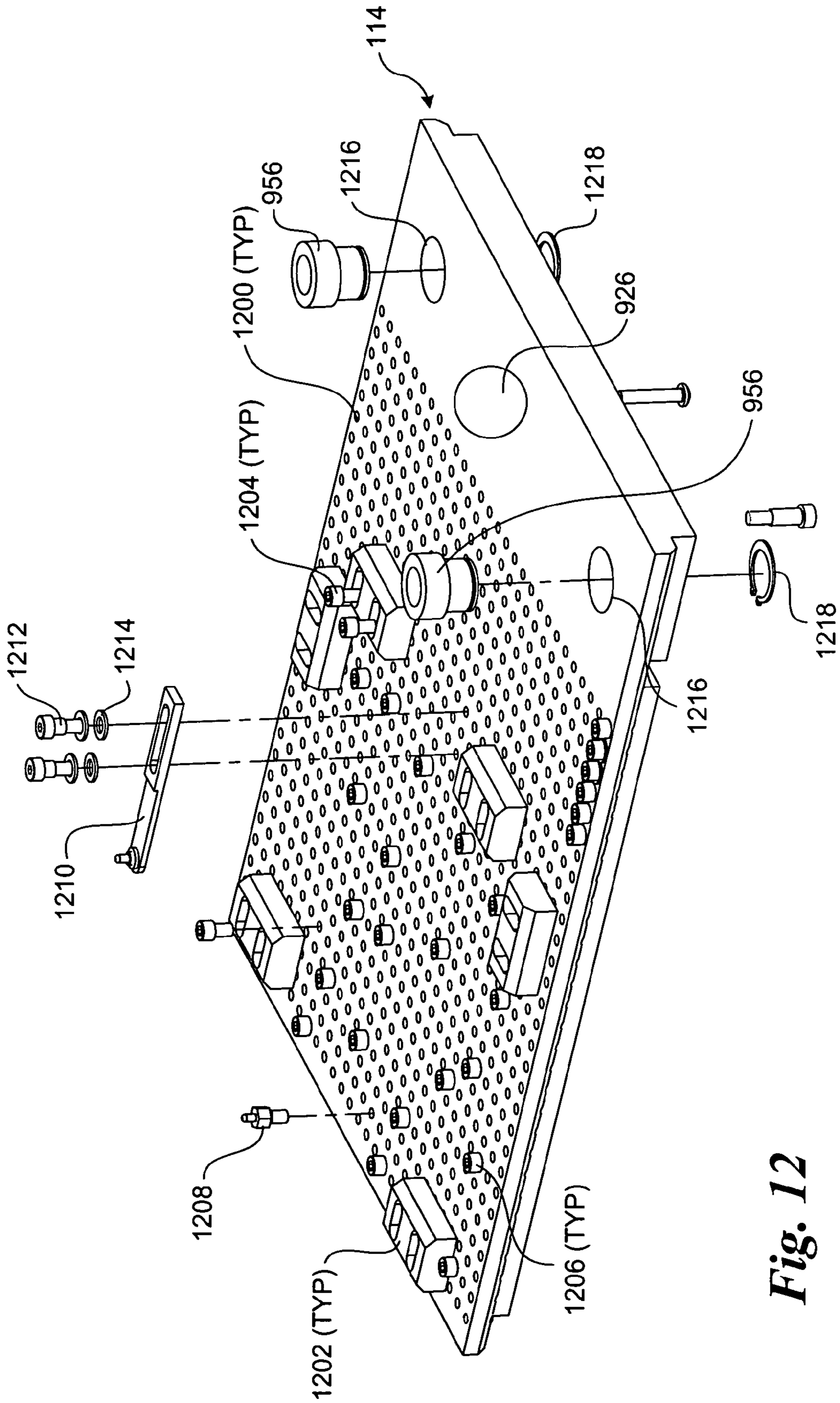


Fig. 12

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UNIVERSAL AUTOMATED CIRCUIT BOARD TESTER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a Divisional Application of co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/261,055 filed on Sep. 30, 2002, the benefit of the filing date for which is claimed under 35 U.S.C. § 120.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The field of invention relates generally to computer systems and, more specifically but not exclusively relates to an apparatus and method for automatically testing circuit boards used in computer systems.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is a common practice to perform testing of circuit boards, such as computer system boards (i.e., motherboards and the like) prior to their sale or use in a computer system product. For example, as computer system boards have evolved, an ever-increasing level of functionality has been built into the boards, such as integrated video subsystems, audio systems, network interfaces, modem circuitry, and the like. Testing to verify the integrity of such functionality is often performed during quality control operations, either on an individual board basis, or using a random sampling scheme.

Generally, computer system boards are tested in the following manner. The board is mounted or otherwise coupled to a test plate or the like, and a plurality of input connectors are manually mated with corresponding system board connectors to provide input power signals to the system board and to coupled input/output (I/O) ports and the like to electronic test equipment that is used to test the performance of the system board via a variety of test operations. Additional manual operations typically include insertion of memory and/or microprocessors. This is a very laborious process, and is also very time-consuming. As a result, the test throughput is low, and test costs are excessive.

In addition, when different types of computer system boards are to be tested, the test environment will often require a uniquely-configured test station for each type of board. For example, different system board types may require different power supply inputs, and/or may have different memory slot locations. Accordingly, the test station used to perform testing of such system boards must be configured to accommodate any unique characteristics of the system boards. This adds to the expense and complexity of a test environment. Furthermore, when the computer system board for a particular test station is phased out of production, the test station is often scrapped, as it cannot be used to test other types of system boards.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing aspects and many of the attendant advantages of this invention will become more readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description, when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to like parts throughout the various views unless otherwise specified:

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FIGS. 1A and 1B are isometric views of an automated universal circuit board tester in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2 is a block schematic architecture diagram illustrating various electronic components and interfaces employed by the universal circuit board tester of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a block schematic diagram illustrating various communication paths employed by one embodiment of the automated universal circuit board tester;

FIG. 4 is a block schematic diagram illustrating electrical components and interfaces employed a top probe unit in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 5 is a block schematic architecture diagram illustrating various components and logic blocks employed by a universal power supply in accordance with one embodiment of the invention

FIG. 6 is a power distribution diagram employed by one embodiment of the invention;

FIGS. 7a-h collectively comprise a flowchart illustrating operations and logic performed by the tester during test operations in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 8 is a flowchart illustrating operations and logic performed during an automated short circuit test;

FIGS. 9A, 9B, and 9C respectively show exploded, frontal, and side isometric views of the automated probe/connector insertion mechanism employed an embodiment of the invention;

FIGS. 10A, 10B, and 10C respectively show fully disengaged, middle, and fully engaged actuation states corresponding to an actuation cycle of the automated probe/connector insertion mechanism;

FIG. 11 is an isometric view of a Side Access Unit (SAU); and

FIG. 12 shows an isometric view of a programmable circuit board carrier plate.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Embodiments of a system, apparatus and method and for performing automated testing of circuit boards, such as computer system boards and the like are described herein. In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth to provide a thorough understanding of embodiments of the invention. One skilled in the relevant art will recognize, however, that the invention can be practiced without one or more of the specific details, or with other methods, components, materials, etc. In other instances, well-known structures, materials, or operations are not shown or described in detail to avoid obscuring aspects of the invention.

Reference throughout this specification to “one embodiment” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, the appearances of the phrases “in one embodiment” or “in an embodiment” in various places throughout this specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment. Furthermore, the particular features, structures, or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments.

An overview of an embodiment of an automatic circuit board tester **100** corresponding to a Scalable Universal Integrated Test System (SUITS) that implements various aspects of the invention is shown in FIGS. 1A and 1B. Automated circuit board tester **100** includes a frame **102** to

which a monitor **104** is attached via a boom **106**. An automated connector insertion/probe mechanism **108** is housed within the frame, along with test electronics **110**. The automated connector insertion/probe mechanism employs a carrier assembly **112** including a carrier plate **114** to which a circuit board comprising a device under test (DUT) **116** (not shown) is coupled during testing. The mechanism further includes a universal cassette **118** to which a replaceable top probe/connector plate **120** is attached, and a replaceable side access unit (SAU) **122** that is used to connect to various I/O port connectors generally disposed at the rear of the DUT.

The test electronics include various circuit boards that are configured to support a universal test environment via a common (Universal Serial Bus (USB)) communication interface, whereby circuit boards having different configurations may be tested using a common (i.e., universal) tester. This is facilitated, in part, by a universal power supply (UPS) **124** that receives power from a power distribution unit (PDU) **126** and supplies power to DUT **116** and other test electronics components. The test electronics further include a digital video measurement unit (DVMU) **127** and combo board **128** used for audio, analog/digital video and USB 2.0 testing contained within a housing mounted to universal cassette **118**.

In general, test operations are controlled by a host computer **130**, disposed toward the bottom of the frame, which is linked in communication with the test electronics via USB and serial communication links. More specifically, the host computer is used to execute software comprising a universal host controller (UHC) that is used to control testing of the DUT. The system also includes a control panel **132** to enable user interaction, and provides an access door **134** to allow the DUT to be loaded and to prevent access to the DUT (and associated test electronics) during testing. Furthermore, the tester includes removable side and top panels **136** and **138** that are installed during testing operations so as to prevent access to the DUT and tester electronics, as shown in FIG. 1B.

A high-level architecture diagram **200** corresponding to test electronics **110** is shown in FIG. 2. As depicted, an AC power input **202** is supplied to PDU **126**. An emergency off (EMO) circuit, depicted as an EMO control **204**, provides an input signal to PDU **126** to shut off the output of the PDU upon detection of an emergency off condition and/or activation of an EMO switch (e.g., via operator activation of an emergency off button on the control panel **132**). The PDU provides AC power to various system components, including host computer **130** and UPS **124**. In one embodiment, the PDU is manufactured by Pulizzi Engineering Inc, Santa Ana Calif.

At a high level, UPS **116** includes an internal USB hub **206** coupled to a UPS interface board **208**, a signal interface board **210**, and an ATX-12 power supply **212**. Further details of the UPS are discussed below with reference to FIGS. 5 and 6.

A first set of I/O cables are connected between host computer and a peripheral device (i.e., I/O) switchbox **214** to enable communication between a monitor **216**, keyboard **218**, and mouse **220** and the host computer via a second set of I/O cables. A barcode scanner **222** is also linked in communication with the host computer, this time via an RS-232 (i.e., serial) link **224**. The RS-232 link further facilitates communication between the host computer and DUT **116** via a port-80 communication channel, wherein this communication link is used for displaying POST (Power On Self Test) codes, as describe below.

The internal USB hub **206** of the UPS serves as a gateway to a USB bus **226**, which is used to enable communication with test electronics coupled to universal cassette **118**, and to control an actuator assembly **228** that is used to automatically insert various connectors into the DUT and couple various probes to circuitry and components disposed on the DUT. The universal cassette electronics include a USB interface **230**, analog to digital conversion (ADC) electronics **232** to measure various power signals at the DUT, and a liquid crystal display **234** that is used to report (i.e., display) various information during the testing operations. The actuator assembly electronics include a USB interface **236**, which is used to provide control signals to an actuator **238** and monitor sensor signals from the actuator.

Generally, a plurality of automated circuit board testers **100** may be used in a factory test environment. In one aspect of this type of implementation, a test server **240** is used to host various UHC software versions, whereby appropriate versions of the UHC software **242** may be downloaded from the test server to be executed by a host computer. In another aspect of this type of implementation, a factory database server **244** may be provided to store test results and to retrieve configuration information. As will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, a single server may be implemented to host the functions provided by both the test server and the factory database server in accordance with one embodiment. Generally, host computer **130** will be linked in communication with the servers via a local area network (LAN) connection, such as an Ethernet link. Such a link may be facilitated by a network switch **246**, which may be incorporated into the tester or may comprise part of the LAN infrastructure.

A high-level communications diagram **300** is shown in FIG. 3. Host computer **130** is shown to further include a combo test card **302** and a data acquisition (DAQ) unit **304**. A keypad **306** has also been added. In general, appropriate cabling and connectors are provided to support communication between the host computer, the universal cassette test electronics, and the DUT over various communication channels. In the illustrated embodiment, these communication channels include a USB 2.0 channel, an IEEE 1394 channel, an Audio channel, and a PQI (prediction quality indicator) bus interface.

An architecture diagram **400** corresponding to a Top Probe Unit (TPU) comprises test electronics that are operatively coupled to the DUT during testing is shown in FIG. 4. The TPU is a USB slave device that includes multiple USB interfaces (I/F), including an USB-to-ADC (analog-to-digital conversion) interface **402**, a USB Digital I/O interface **404**, and a USB LCD interface **406**. In one embodiment, each of USB interfaces **402**, **404**, and **406** are facilitated by corresponding ActiveWire® USB interface modules, manufactured by ActiveWire, Inc., Palo Alto Calif. The TPU further includes an Advanced Graphic Port graphics card **408** that is operatively coupled to the AGP bus on the DUT during testing, and an Ultra-X Port 80 RS-232 PCI interface card **410** that is operatively coupled to a PCI expansion bus slot on the DUT. In one embodiment, the TPU further provides a LAN network interface card (NIC) **412** that is connected to an appropriate PCI expansion bus slot on the DUT. Optionally, for DUT's with built-in NIC support, that LAN interface is facilitated by a connector connected to the back of the DUT (not shown).

An architecture block diagram **500** corresponding to one embodiment of universal power supply **124** is shown in FIG. 5, while a corresponding power distribution diagram **600** is shown in FIG. 6. The diagram now shows further details of

UPS interface board **208**, which performs several test control operations, and includes interface circuitry and corresponding interface connectors. In addition to USB hub **206**, the UPS interface board includes programmable circuitry corresponding to a DUT short circuit check logic block **504**, an actuator control logic block **506**, analog-to-digital conversion operations corresponding to an ADC block **508**, and power supply control logic, depicted by a block **510**.

As discussed above, the universal power supply supplies power to the various circuit board types supported by the system. In cases in which the DUT comprises a computer system board, appropriate power input must be supplied to DUT, typically in response to power input sequencing signals provided by the DUT. Under normal (i.e., non-test) use, a computer system board will typically be housed in a chassis that also includes a power supply configured to support the computer system board type. During boot-up operations, power sequencing signals are generated by the computer system board and supplied as input signals to the power supply, which outputs corresponding power levels on various wires in response thereto. Through the use of power supply control logic block **510** and other control aspects, the universal power supply is able to provide appropriate power-sequencing and power levels to a variety of different board types.

The universal power supply includes several interface connectors for data communications and power input functions. These include, external USB ports **512**, **514**, and **516**, a 25-pin DSub connector **518**, a 2×7 Mini-fit connector **520**, a 2×7 Mini-fit connector **522**, and a 2×10 ATX power connector **524**. Each of these connectors are standard well-known connectors that are mounted to the UPS interface board **208**, and are disposed at the back of the UPS housing to enable cable access to the connectors. An internal USB port **526** is also mounted to the UPS interface board to enable communication via a USB link with signal interface board **210**. Each of the USB ports is internally linked to USB Hub **206**, thereby enabling signals received or sent via USB port **516** to be passed to the other USB ports. The UPS also provides a connector **528** via which a system reset signal may be received to cause a system reset operation to occur.

Power input is supplied to the DUT via cables connector to connectors **520**, **522**, and **524**. The power is originally supplied as inputs to UPS interface board **208** from ATX power supply **212**, as depicted by a “Main Power” input **530**, an “Optional Power” input **532**, and a “Peripheral Power” input **534**. The UPS interface board then provides appropriate power to DUT **116** as defined by the power supply control logic in response to applicable power sequence/control signals.

In accordance with one aspect of the universal power supply, the device may be entirely controlled by host computer **130** via a single (USB) communication interface. USB hub **206** also enables USB communication signals to be routed over other USB links. This enables USB communication with other components of a given system. It also enables multiple test stands to be linked together in a daisy-chain fashion, thereby enabling a signal host computer to control multiple test stands. A further aspect of the USB control scheme corresponds to the ability to communicate with downstream components that are not linked to the UPS (or even the host PC) via a USB link.

The UPS includes a means for measuring the voltage levels of the power input supplied to the DUT via ADC **508**. In one embodiment, the ADC comprises a 10-bit resolution ADC, model number TLV1548C manufactured by Texas Instruments. During the testing, the voltage levels are moni-

tored to verify they fall within predefined limits. If a voltage level limit is exceeded (over-voltage or under-voltage), the power supply control logic will detect the condition and shut down the power supply output to the DUT.

The signal interface board **210** is used to provide an interface between USB signals, and other data signals used by the UPS interface board, as respectively depicted USB 1.1 signals **536** and DIO (digital input/output) lines **538**. For example, signal interface board **210** provides a communication interface that enables actuator command signals corresponding to a predefined command set to be sent over a USB link to the UPS (e.g., via USB port **516** from the host computer), whereupon they are received by the signal interface board, and converted into DIO-compatible signals that are passed to actuator control logic block **506**. The actuator control block interprets the signals it receives, and causes an appropriate control signal to be sent to the actuator via 25-pin DSub connector **518**. This signal interface also supports communication back to the host PC over the USB link, such as providing the results of the short circuit test operations described below, which is performed by DUT short circuit check logic **504**.

The UPS also provides an EOS (Electrical Overstress) function. The EOS function may be turned on and off via an EOS_CTRL signal that is received via a USB link. This function is turned on at the end of a test (after power off) to ensure that all the power rails on the DUT are properly drained to ground.

In general, the various components of the USB described above will be packaged within a housing **540**. In one embodiment, the housing corresponds having a 2U rack-mountable form factor. The housing is configured such that each of the connectors disposed at the top side of the unit are accessible. Additionally, AC input power **542** may be supplied to power supply **212** via a conventional power input connector, such as a Beldon connector.

Automated Connector Insertion Kinematics and Universal Mechanical Interface

With reference to FIGS. **9A–C**, and **10A–C**, further details of automated connector insertion/probe mechanism **108** are now disclosed. In one embodiment, a single linear actuator is employed to cause concurrent actuation about four orthogonal axes. In one embodiment the linear actuator comprises a pneumatic cylinder **900**, which has a body coupled a carriage **902** and a rod operatively coupled to frame **102** (not shown). The concurrent multi-axis actuation includes a vertical actuation that is used to vertically move the DUT so that it engages various connectors and probes disposed on the underside of top probe/connector plate **120**. This is enabled, in part, by means of four vertical actuation guide ramps **904** (not shown in FIG. **9A**), which are mounted on carriage **902**. Carriage **902** rolls on a plurality of wheels **906** mounted within a frame **908** that is mounted to frame members **910**.

A vertical push plate **911** is provided to push carrier assembly **112** upward. Four brackets **912** are coupled to the underside of vertical push plate **911**. A respective cam follower **913** is coupled towards the bottom of each of brackets **912** and is sized to fit within a corresponding slot **914** formed in vertical actuation guide ramps **904**.

Carrier assembly **112** includes a carrier frame **916** to which a pair of linear bearings **918** are coupled. Likewise, a pair of similar linear bearings **919** are coupled to vertical push plate **911**. Each of linear bearings **916** and **917** slidingly

engage a mating vertically-disposed linear bearing shaft **920** that is operatively coupled at its respective upper and lower ends to frame **102**.

A drawer slide **922** is coupled between carrier frame **916** and a carrier plate support **924** on which carrier plate **114** rests to enable the carrier plate to be pulled forward relative to the carrier frame, thereby enabling a DUT that has just completed testing to be removed and a new DUT to be installed on the carrier plate. A knob **926** is provided to further assist an operator in pulling and pushing carrier plate **114**.

In addition to a vertical actuation axis, three horizontal actuation axes are also provided. These actuation axes correspond to respective side activation unit (SAU) actuators, which are used to actuate SAUs **122** (removed from clarity in FIGS. **9A–9C**). Each SAU actuator comprises a SAU carriage **928** that is enabled to move linearly relative to carrier frame **916** by means of end linear bearing assemblies **930** and a center linear bearing assembly **932**. Each SAU carriage further includes a pair of cam followers **934** that engage respective SAU actuation ramps **936** during SAU actuation.

Further details of universal cassette **118** and top probe/connector plate **120** are shown in FIGS. **9B** and **10A**. The combination of universal cassette **118** and top probe/connector plate **120** are designed to enabling testing of various DUT board types, wherein the functions provided by universal cassette **118** are “universal” to all board types, while top probe/connector plate **120** is configured for a certain board type or set of board types. Accordingly, mounting provisions are provided to enable top probe/connector plate **120** to be swapped out. These include a set of toggle clamps **938** and plate alignment means that are used to align the top probe/connector plate relative to the universal cassette.

Universal cassette includes various components that are used to simulate the DUT functioning within an actual work environment, such as within a computer. These include a floppy drive **940**, a CD-ROM drive **942**, and a hard disk drive (disposed beneath the floppy drive). Generally, the interfaces to each of these devices are provided via connectors coupled on the underside of top probe/connector plate **120**. Optionally, such connectors may be disposed on the underside of the universal cassette when the DUT types share a common configuration for such connectors.

Typically, different board types will have different connector/component layout configurations. Accordingly, each top probe/connector plate **120** will be configured for a corresponding board type or set of types. This means that the various probes **944** and connectors **946** will be configured, both in orientation and type, so as to mate with corresponding target pads/traces/components and connectors for the DUT type. In addition to general connector types, such as power, and peripheral device (e.g., disk drives, IDE, etc.) connectors, one or both of the top probe/connector plate and universal cassette may employ peripheral (expansion) bus extenders **948**, which enable various types of peripheral boards, such as video boards, sound boards, network interface cards (NICs), SCSI cards, special purpose cards, etc., to be operatively coupled to the DUT during testing operations.

Another aspect of the automated insertion capabilities of the system is the ability to automatically insert memory and/or microprocessors. For example, the top probe/connector plate may be configured to hold one or more DIMMs (dual inline memory modules) **949**, which are inserted into corresponding DIMM connectors on the DUT. Additionally, if the DUT type employs a removable processor, such as a slot **1** processor, a corresponding processor may be mounted

to the top probe/connector plate and inserted into a corresponding connector on the DUT.

Further details illustrating an actuator motion cycle are shown in FIGS. **9A–C** and **10A–C**. FIGS. **9A** and **10A** show an initial configuration corresponding to a fully-disengaged actuation condition. Under this condition, the pneumatic cylinder is fully retracted such that cam followers **913** are at the bottom of vertical actuation guides **904**. While in this position a lower position switch **950** will be engaged, which will enable access door **134** to be opened, thereby enabling an operator to install or remove a DUT. After the access door has been shut, the actuator sequence may begin. The position of the access door is sensed by a door engagement sensor **952**.

A mid actuation position is shown in FIGS. **10B** and **11B**. In this instance, a valve is positioned to enable air to flow into pneumatic cylinder **900**, causing the cylinder’s rod to be extended. This cause carriage **902** to move toward the left, which pushes vertical push plate **911** upward by means of engagement of cam followers **913** with vertical actuation guide ramps **904**. As is further shown, SAU cam followers **934** are about to engage SAU actuation ramps **936**. Furthermore, carrier plate **114** is positioned such that it is just below a pair of alignment posts **954**.

A fully-engaged position is shown in FIGS. **10C** and **11C**. As vertical push plate **911** is pushed upward, it engages carrier frame **916**, which in turn supports carrier plate **114**, pushing the carrier plate upward in turn. As the carrier plate moves upwards, a pair of bushings **956** disposed in the plate begin to engage alignment post **954**. Since the carrier plate is “floating” on carrier plate frame **924**, the carrier plate is enabled to self align to the alignment posts. As the carrier plate is lifted in proper alignment via the alignment posts, various connectors **946** are engaged with corresponding connectors on the DUT, as well as various probes engaging with target traces, pads, components etc. At the same time, memory DIMMs, a CPU, and peripheral expansion bus connectors are also coupled, dependent on the particular DUT type configuration. This completes the vertical part of the automated test probe/connector insertion. Once the carriage assembly is at the top of the actuation cycle, testing operations may begin. This condition is indicated by a fully-engaged (ACTUATOR_FULL_UP) position sensor **960**.

Side Access Unit (SAU)

In concurrence with the foregoing vertical actuation, horizontal actuation of the SAUs is performed. As the carriage assembly moves upward, SAU cam followers **934** engage SAU actuation ramps **936**, causing SAU carriages **928** to be moved horizontally inward. As a result, the connectors on the SAU (shown in FIG. **X**) become engaged with corresponding connectors on the DUT. For example, a typical DUT may comprise an ATX-compatible motherboard, which includes a plurality of connectors having a predefined configuration that are mounted to the motherboard such that they can be horizontally accessed from opening in the case in which the motherboard is to be installed. These connectors typically include serial and parallel ports, as well as a keyboard port, a mouse port, and optional USB, game/audio ports, and network ports. Other types of ports may be provided as well.

An exemplary SAU **1100** is shown in FIG. **11**. SAU **1100** includes a frame **1101** comprising a front plate **1102** and a back plate **1104**, which are coupled together by means of a plurality of fasteners **1006** and standoffs **1008**. A pair of through holes **1100** are drilled through each of the front and

back plates to enable the frame to be coupled to a SAU actuator **928** via bolts **964** (See, e.g., FIG. 9A). The SAU frame is used to hold a plurality of connectors coupled to front plate **1102**, including a keyboard port connector **1112**, a mouse port connector **1114**, a first pair of USB connectors **1116**, **1118**, and an IEEE 1394 connector **1120**. The connectors further include a 9-pin SubD serial port connector **1122** and a 25-pin SubD parallel port connector **1124**. An RCA audio connector **1126** is disposed beneath the parallel port connector, along with a fiber optic connector **1128**. A set of audio jacks **1130** are disposed to the left of the parallel port connector, along with provisions for a pair of additional audio jacks **1132** to support future five-way audio interfaces. A second pair of USB connectors **1136**, **1138** are disposed toward the left end of the front plate, along with a conventional network RJ-45 connector **1140**.

Generally, the various connectors and jacks are arranged in a manner corresponding to a standard configuration, such as the ATX standard. It is not required that all of the connector and jacks be used, and in fact different SAUs may be employed for different DUT type configurations.

Each of the various SAU connectors and jacks is connected to a cable that is used to carry signals to corresponding test electronics discussed above with reference to FIG. 2-4 (not shown in FIG. 11). These include a keyboard cable **1142**, a mouse port cable **1144**, an IEEE 1392 cable **1146**, a serial cable **1148**, a parallel cable **1150**, and a network cable **1152**. Each of these cables include an appropriate mating connector, as would be commonly employed in computer systems and the like. In the illustrated embodiment, wires **1154** connected to the various audio jacks are commonly coupled to a connector **1156**.

In one embodiment, one or more of the connectors/jacks are spring loaded, such as depicted by springs **1158** and **1160** in the illustrated embodiment. The springs enable different forces to be applied to individual connectors and jacks when the SAU is urged forward to couple corresponding connectors/pins on the DUT, and maintain a constant force on connectors/jacks during the testing operations.

In some instances, only one of the three SAU axes may be employed, such an axis that enabled connectors to be inserted at the back of the DUT via a corresponding SAU. Under such situations, either or both of the side SAU actuators may be removed.

Reconfigurable "Programmable" Carrier Plate

With further reference to FIG. 12, carrier plate **114** provides a universal circuit board mounting platform that may be adapted (programmed) to secure DUTs having a variety of different form factors. The carrier plate includes a grid of threaded holes **1200**. The threaded holes enable various alignment blocks **1202** to be positioned anywhere within the grid area via corresponding threaded fasteners **1204**. They also enable threaded fasteners **1206** to be located so as to support the DUT at desired locations. Typically, threaded fasteners **1206** may comprise plastic fasteners to electrically isolate the DUT from the carrier plate

Preferably, threaded holes **1200** will be arranged in an accurate grid. In one embodiment $\frac{1}{4}$ -20 holes are arrayed in a 0.500 inch grid pattern. This enables accurate alignment of DUTs to the carrier plate (and thus indirectly to top probe/connector plate **120**). In some implementations, sufficient alignment may be facilitated by alignment blocks **1202** alone. In other instances, it may be desired to use one or more alignment pins **1208**.

DUTs may generally be secured to the carrier plate via one or more securing means. In one embodiment, one or

more clamping bars **1210** are employed to secure the DUT to the carrier plate. Typically, clamping bars **1210** are secured to carrier plate **114** by means of shoulder screws **1212** and washers **1214**.

As discussed above, a pair of alignment bushings **956** are disposed within holes **1216** formed toward the front corners of carrier plate **114**. In one embodiment, the alignment bushings may be secured via a light press fit. In another embodiment, a "C" ring **1218** is coupled toward a groove **1220** formed in the base of alignment bushing **956**, whereby the alignment bushing is secured via engagement with a shoulder **1222** on the top side of the carrier plate and the C ring on the bottom side of the carrier plate.

Universal Host Controller Software

As discussed above, control of the testing operations is provided, in part, by universal host controller software **242** running on host PC **130**. A flowchart illustrating various operations performed during a test sequence in accordance with one embodiment of the invention is shown in FIGS. 7a-h. The process begins in a block **700**, wherein a user scans the serial number of the DUT (e.g., computer system board) with scanner **222**, wherein the UHC software reads the serial number via the RS-232 connection with the scanner. In response, the host computer submits a request to factory database server **244** in a block **702** to obtain permission for the DUT to be tested. The database will also provide the product code and operation ID (OPID) information of the DUT. The OPID will tell the UHC software if the DUT is at a valid location in the factory, for this case, the SUITS-200 Functional Test area. UHC uses the product code information to verify that the DUT is tested with the correct probe plate and side-access unit (SAU).

In blocks **704**, **706**, and **708**, an operator puts the DUT on the carrier plate, pushes the carrier plate in, and closes access door **134**, respectively. The operator then presses the START button on control panel **114** to initiate the beginning of the automated test process, as depicted by a block **710**. The UHC detects the start of the test by monitoring for a corresponding start signal on USB interface **230**. Upon detecting a valid start signal, a stop# bit is checked in a block **712** to determine whether the tester is available or is locked. Continuing to FIG. 7b, if the stop# bit is asserted (low), the UHC software reports that the tester is locked, in accordance with a decision block **714** and a block **716**. If the bit is not asserted, a timestamp indicating the start of the test is recorded and displayed on LCD **234**.

Next, in a block **718**, the carrier plate sensor is checked to verify the carrier plate is in the proper position. If it is not, the test is stopped, and the UHC software reports (via LCD **172**) that the carrier plate is not closed in accordance with a decision block **720** and a block **722**. In a block **724**, the door sensor is checked. If the sensor indicates the door is not locked, the test is stopped and the UHC software reports that the door is not closed in accordance with a decision block **726** and a block **728**. If the door is in its proper position, the door is automatically locked in a block **728** via actuation of an electronic lock **962**.

Moving forward to FIG. 7c, the up actuator (i.e., pneumatic cylinder **900**) is actuated in a block **730**. This causes the DUT to be raised into contact with corresponding connectors and test probes disposed on the underside of the universal cassette **118** and top connector/probe plate **120**. It also positions SAUs **122** to engage various connectors disposed at the rear and/or sides of the DUT. In a block **732**, the ACTUATOR_FULL_UP sensor (**960**) is checked, and a determination of its position is made in a decision block **734**.

If the actuator not is fully engaged, the ACTUATOR_FULL_UP sensor will read low, causing the test to be stopped and the UHC software to report that the actuator is not fully engaged in a block 736.

Once the actuator is fully engaged, a DUT short circuit test is performed in a block 738, further details of which are discussed below. In a decision block 740 a determination is made to whether the short circuit test is passed. If it has not, the test is stopped and the UHC software reports that a short circuit has been found in a block 742. As indicated by the dashed outline of the blocks, the short circuit test is an optional test, which may be enabled by a corresponding entry in a software initialization file.

As shown at the top of FIG. 7d, the next operation comprises turning on the DUT 5V standby voltage (5 VSB) in a block 744. After a two-second wait, a switch on control signal (SWON_CTRL) comprising a two-second SWON# pulse is generated in a block 746. In accordance with block 748 and 752 and a decision block 750, once the SWON# pulse is generated, the UHC software monitors for the occurrence of a power supply on (low) signal from the DUT (DUT_PSON#). If a DUT_PSON# low signal is not detected within two seconds, the test and stopped and corresponding information is reported.

In response to receiving a low DUT_PSON# signal, a PSON_CTRL (power supply on control) signal is immediately driven to high in a block 753, and the time is recorded (T1). Next, as shown by a block 754 at the top of FIG. 7e, the power supply is turned on, and the UHC software monitors for a DUT power OK (DUT_PWROK) signal in a block 756. If a DUT_PWROK (high) signal is not detected, the test is stopped and a corresponding report is made in accordance with a decision block 758 and a block 760. Once the DUT_PWROK signal goes high, the time is records (T2) in a block 762, and a determination is made in a decision block 764 to whether or not the DUT_PWROK timing (i.e., T2-T1) is within the timing specification. If it is not, the test is stopped and a corresponding report is made in a block 766.

Next, a DUT voltage measurement is made in a block 768. Generally, this measurement is made to verify that all of the main power rails (5 VSB, 5V, 3.3V and 12V) are within the voltage margin specified by the initialization file. As determined in a decision block 770 at the top of FIG. 7f, if any of the power values are outside of the voltage margin (i.e., too high or too low), the test is stopped and a corresponding voltage measure failure report is made in a block 772.

In a block 773 the system boots, and POST (Power On Self Test) codes begin to be reported in a block 774. In one embodiment, the DUT boots into a Microsoft Windows operating system, such as Windows 2000. Accordingly, Windows tests based on a Windows-based Modular Test Architecture (winMTA) are executed in block 776, governed by the WinMTA test executive. WinMTA is a test executive software that controls the individual test modules to be run on the DUT. Test modules are developed separately and the WinMTA software executes them and reports the results to UHC. In accordance with a block 778 and decision block 780 and 782, the UHC software monitors for a DUT message, and determines if such is received within a pre-defined timeout period. If the DUT message is not received prior to completion of the timeout period, the test is stopped and a test timeout result together with the POST code information is reported in a block 784. The DUT will send all test results to the UHC.

Once the UHC software receives a TEST ENDED message (MID_TEST_ENDED) from the DUT, it will start monitoring for a DUT_PSON#=1 signal, indicating the

DUT has shut down, as depicted by a block 786. This ends reporting of the POST code to the host, as depicted by a block 790. A determination is made in a block 788 to whether the DUT passed or failed the test and corresponding information is recorded. The power supply on control signal (PSON_CTRL) is then turned off in a block 792, a wait period of two seconds is performed, and the 5 VSB signal is turned off in a block 794.

Continuing with blocks 796 and 798 at the top of FIG. 7h, an EOS_CTRL control signal is turned on for two hundred milliseconds and then turned off. In response, all the voltage rails (at this point already turned off) are tied together to ground to ensure that the DUT is totally discharged before being shipped. The actuator is deactuated in a block 800, and the ACTUATOR_FULL_DOWN sensor signal is checked in a block 802. If the ACTUATOR_FULL_DOWN sensor signal indicates that the actuator is not fully-disengaged, the answer to a decision block 804 is No, causing the test to be stopped in a block 806. An actuator not fully disengaged error message is then reported. If the sensor indicates proper actuator disengagement, the actuator is disabled in a block 808, and the test result is reported to the factory database in a block 810. Afterwards, a green or red LED is activated (as appropriate) in a block 812, door 134 is automatically unlocked in a block 814, thereby enabling the operator to remove the DUT in a block 816, completing the test cycle.

Details of various operations performed during the optional short-circuit testing in accordance with an embodiment of the invention are illustrated by the flowchart of FIG. 8. In a block 820, the DUT short circuit check is enabled by setting a SHORT_CTRL# signal to 0). Next, in a block 822, two power lines are selected at a time (i.e., a power line and a common line), and a corresponding short circuit test is performed. In one embodiment, the power lines to check include 12V, 5V, 5 VSB, and 3.3V. In a block 824, the SHORT# signal is read to determine whether a short circuit is indicated. If the SHORT#=0, a short circuit is detected in accordance with a decision block 826, and corresponding data are logged in a block 828. At a decision block 830 a determination is made to whether all of the power lines have been checked. If not, the logic returns to block 822, and the operations of block 822, 824, 826, and 828 are repeated for the next set of power lines. After all of the power lines have been checked, the DUT short circuit check is disabled in a block 812 by setting the DUT_CTRL#=1.

The above description of illustrated embodiments of the invention, including what is described in the Abstract, is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. While specific embodiments of, and examples for, the invention are described herein for illustrative purposes, various equivalent modifications are possible within the scope of the invention, as those skilled in the relevant art will recognize.

These modifications can be made to the invention in light of the above detailed description. The terms used in the following claims should not be construed to limit the invention to the specific embodiments disclosed in the specification and the claims. Rather, the scope of the invention is to be determined entirely by the following claims, which are to be construed in accordance with established doctrines of claim interpretation.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for testing a computer system board, comprising:
 - loading the computer system board into a test apparatus;

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automatically coupling a connector to provide power input to the computer system board via the test apparatus;

automatically inserting a microprocessor into a corresponding connector on the computer system board;

automatically performing a plurality of computer system board tests; and

storing results of the automatic testing.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

determining a type of the computer system board; and

automatically supplying the computer system board with a corresponding set of power inputs during the automatic testing operations.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising sequencing a plurality of power input signals in response to corresponding power command signals provided by the computer system board.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of system board tests include testing the computer system board for short circuits.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of system board tests include testing a video subsystem of the computer system board.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising automatically inserting one or more memory devices into corresponding connectors on the computer system board.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising automatically operatively coupling a peripheral card to an expansion slot on the computer system board.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising automatically connecting test electronics to at least one input/output (I/O) port connector on the computer system board.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein said at least one I/O port connector comprises at least two I/O port connectors, each having a different connection axis.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

determining a type of the computer system board; and

automatically performing a particular set of computer system board tests corresponding to the type of computer system board that is determined.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the type of computer system board is determined by performing the operations of:

storing data in a database relating respective serial numbers of a plurality of computer system boards with corresponding computer system board types;

scanning a serial number bar code on a given computer system board that is to be tested; and

determining the system board type of that computer system board via a lookup of the database using the serial number that was scanned.

12. A method for testing a computer system board, comprising:

loading the computer system board into a test apparatus;

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automatically coupling a connector to provide power input to the computer system board via the test apparatus;

automatically connecting test electronics to at least one input/output (I/O) port connector on the computer system board, wherein said at least one I/O port connector comprises at least two I/O port connectors, each having a different connection axis;

automatically performing a plurality of computer system board tests; and

storing results of the automatic testing.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

determining a type of the computer system board; and

automatically supplying the computer system board with a corresponding set of power inputs during the automatic testing operations.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising sequencing a plurality of power input signals in response to corresponding power command signals provided by the computer system board.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein the plurality of system board tests include testing the computer system board for short circuits.

16. The method of claim 12, wherein the plurality of system board tests include testing a video subsystem of the computer system board.

17. The method of claim 12, further comprising automatically inserting one or more memory devices into corresponding connectors on the computer system board.

18. The method of claim 12, further comprising automatically operatively coupling a peripheral card to an expansion slot on the computer system board.

19. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

determining a type of the computer system board; and

automatically performing a particular set of computer system board tests corresponding to the type of computer system board that is determined.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the type of computer system board is determined by performing the operations of:

storing data in a database relating respective serial numbers of a plurality of computer system boards with corresponding computer system board types;

scanning a serial number bar code on a given computer system board that is to be tested; and

determining the system board type of that computer system board via a lookup of the database using the serial number that was scanned.

21. The method of claim 12, further comprising automatically inserting a microprocessor into a corresponding connector on the computer system board.

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